Child Poverty in Canada: Some Contributing Factors and issues

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis presents some issues with regard to the problems in definition and measurement of poverty, both theoretically and empirically. Another objective is to identify some of the important factors related to child poverty in Canada. Poverty and inequality are examined from three theoretical perspectives: functionalist, conflict and feminist, in order to see which theory is better supported by the empirical evidence. Family type, residing in different provinces, age and number of children, age of the head of the family were found to be important factors in the literature. The three theories' central arguments were supported by the literature. In addition, regression analysis from the General Social Survey Cycle 10 was used to identify the most important factors with regard to child poverty, while other factors are controlled. The analysis indicated that age of the household head was the most important factor, followed by the number of children in the household, living in a lone-parent family, receiving income from work or government, education, and residing in Atlantic Canada. The results show that human capital factors such as age and education, considered important in the functionalist theory, were the most significant, followed by structural factors such as residing in different regions, emphasized in the conflict perspective. Gender, central to the feminist paradigm, was not significant, but could be important through other processes such as number of children and full or part-time work.

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1: Introduction

Child poverty is an important social problem in Canada. However, the extent of the problem and its severity is consistently debated since there is little consensus on how to define and measure poverty. There are also different points of view with regard to solutions to this problem. For example, looking at poverty in absolute or relative terms results in different interpretations and discussions. This exacerbates the problem of making international comparisons between developing and developed countries.

In addition to the issues mentionned above, there is little convergence regarding poverty, the reasons for its existence, (the purpose it serves) and whether it can be eradicated. Different perspectives such as the conservative or the functionalist paradigm, the socialist or the conflict paradigm and the feminist paradigm all view poverty differently and consequently imply different solutions.

Moreover, the political and social climate influences how different social problems are viewed. For example, in a conservative period, some social issues are not considered problematic or threatening and poverty may not be a big concern. As a result, poverty gets reconceptualized and redefined over the years and its importance and its severity are also viewed differently.

Despite the different views and perspectives on poverty and the ongoing debate about the issues involved, this problem remains a pressing one, especially for children. Without reducing the level of child poverty, we risk not only the present, but the future as well.

Child poverty and issues related to it should be taken into consideration in a family context, since the children's financial situation depends on the parent (s) and

according to the National Council of Welfare, children are poor because their parents are poor (2000).

Furthermore, the growing polarization of the rich and the poor in Canada, and the widening gap between them should also be taken into consideration. According to the Canadian Council on Social Development :

> The fact that poverty is becoming increasingly concentrated among certain groups is very troubling, especially for children who inhabit the social and economic margins of Canadian life. Addressing child poverty remains one of the key challenges facing the country in the new millennium. (2000:73).

In this thesis, I intend to review the literature and the debates about the definition and measurement of poverty in Chapter 2.

In Chapter 3, poverty and inequality will be examined and explained from different theoretical perspectives including functionalism, conflict and feminist paradigms.

The extent of child poverty is examined in Chapter 4, and the variation by region, family type, the depth and duration of poverty, and the gender gap are presented. Data from the General Social Suvery will be presented and analyzed.

Finally, in Chapter 5, we review the social and physical implication of child poverty.

2: Literature Review

Defining and measuring poverty is a difficult task because there are different ways of defining poverty and there is little consensus about what is the best approach. Furthermore, it is difficult to discuss and make comparisons with regard to poverty internationally.

The concept of poverty is viewed in two different ways by sociologists : Relative and Absolute poverty. Relative poverty is universal by definition and refers to the deprivation of some people in relation to those who have more. Much more serious, however, is absolute poverty-a deprivation of resources that is life-threatening (Macionis et al., 1999:173).

In discussing poverty in Canada, we must also distinguish between absolute and relative poverty, since absolute povery is the state of being without essentials for living : without food, water, clothing and shelter. In Canada, compared to third world countries, there is little absolute poverty, except for the homeless and some aboriginal peoples. Instead, poverty in Canada is defined as poverty relative to the normal standard of living that is determined by standards set by the federal government (Synnott, 1996:100).

The absolute measure of poverty, is more concerned with physical survival rather than psychological and social well-being. The strictest approach of this measure results in a standard of living which is only sufficient to keep the human body together. The relative approach, however, is based on equity and social inclusion, in other word, on some notion of the extent to which society should tolerate inequality in the distribution of income. Theorists taking this view argue that

> someone who has so little that he or she stands out in relation to the surrounding community will feel marginalized. Marginalized people, whether children or adults, affect the social cohesion of a community because they no longer feel part of what they see as an indifferent or hostile society. (Ross et al., 2000:5-6)

The difference between the two approaches is their judgment of what constitutes a minimum standard of living that respects the need to function with dignity in society. However, we have to take into consideration that in rich countries of the industrialized world, the income level that is associated with a relative definition of poverty will be many times the level that is required to assure physical survival (Ross et al., 2000:6).

Therefore, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to count or quantify poverty accurately and to determine an absolute minimum level, because definitions of "basic needs" or "necessity" vary across time, place and social groups (Alvi et al., 2000:45).

Moreover, the distinction has an important implication with regard to global stratification. People living in high-income countries focus generally on the relative poverty of some of the members of society, highlighting how those people lack resources compared to others. Relative poverty, by definition, cuts across every society, whether poor or rich (Macionis et al., 1999:188).

The concept of absolute poverty however, is especially important in a global perspective. Commonly, human beings near absolute poverty lack adequate nutrition for health and long-term survival. Some absolute poverty exists in Canada, like inadequate nutrition that leaves the elderly or children subject to illness and starvation. However, such immediate life-threatening poverty strikes only a small share of people, compared to low-income countries in the world (Macionis et al., 1999:188).

The global dimensions of absolute poverty put the lives of perhaps 800 million

human beings - one in seven of the earth's people - at risk. Even in Canada , families go hungry, endure poor health and live in inadequate housing because of the wrenching reality of poverty (Macionis et al., 1999:173)

Absolute definitions of poverty focus on a minimum level of income or standard of living which is difficult to conceptualize universally, while relative conceptions define poverty in relation to people's reference group or the society's distribution of income. The most important point to consider is that policy makers, sociologists, and the general public will never reach a consensus in terms of how to define and view poverty. This is because defining poverty is a political act that largely depends on people's beliefs and values (Alvi et al., 2000:46).

2:1 Global Comparisons

In order to put the discussion of the absolute and relative poverty into perspective, some global comparisons are made in order to see the differences between a developed country like Canada and some developing countries.

Inequality is found everywhere, including in Canada. Social stratification is more pronounced in global perspectives, with regard to consumption and ownership by income level.

Table 1 shows the differences between the 20% richest and poorest countries in the world in terms of consumption and ownership. These data show that the richest countries consumption and ownership are much greater than the poorest countries, thus indicating the enormous differences between rich and poor countries.

Table 1 : Global consumption and Ownership by Income Level

	Richest 20%	Poorest 20%
	(in percent)	
Consumption		
of all private consumption expenditures	**86**	**1.3**
of all meat and fish	**45**	**5.0**
of all paper	**84**	**1.1**
of total energy	**58**	**4.0**
Ownership		
of all telephone lines	**74**	**1.5**
of all vehicles	**87**	**1.0**

Source: United Nations Development Program, in Macionis et al., 1999:184

According to Macionis (1999:183-4), the richest 20% of Canadian families earn nearly 38% of the national income, however, the richest 20% of families worldwide, receive fully 70% of global income. On the other hand, the poorest 20% of the Canadian population earn 7.4% of our national income. By contrast, the poorest fifth of the

world's people struggle to survive on just 2% of the income. Income is in fact distributed far less equally in the world as a whole than it is in Canada. As a result, the average member of our society lives very well by world standards. In reality, most Canadians living below Statistics Canada's low-income cut-off measure live much better and have a better standard of living than the majority of the earth's population (1999:183-4).

For the majority in the world's low-income countries, poverty is the rule. With incomes of only several hundred dollars a year, the burden of poverty is much greater, compared to the poor in Canada. Death often comes early in low-income countries, because families lack adequate food, safe water, housing and access to medical care. Furthermore, many children in low-income countries leave their families because their chances to survive are better on the streets (Macionis et al., 1999:187-9).

However, this does not mean that deprivation and poverty here at home should be regarded as a minor problem. Poverty is an important problem in Canada and it affects negatively the lives of those who live in poverty and deprivation and affects their physical and psychological well-being. In a rich society like Canada, the lack of food, health care, housing for millions, many of them children, is a national tragedy. However, to put the situation into perspective, poverty in low-income countries is both more extensive and severe than in Canada (Macionis et al., 1999:187).

2.2: Definition and Measurement of Poverty in Canada

In Canada also, there are two basic approaches with regard to defining and measuring poverty: the absolute and the relative. Different intermediate measures fall between these extreme measures. The absolute measure is based on the assumption that an absolute measure of poverty can be determined by "examining an essential basket of goods and services, deemed necessary for physical survival . The cost of this basket represents an objective dollar measure of poverty" (Ross et al., 2000:6).

This approach, taken to the extreme, results in a standard of living which is sufficient only to keep the human body together. This purely physical approach would consist of a budget which is composed of food provided by a food bank or a charitable group, shelter provided by a community hostel, and access to remedial health care. This level is determined by examining an essential basket of goods and services sufficient for physical survival. This extreme approach, however, is not really advocated and applied (Ross et al., 2000:6).

According to the "Canadian Fact Book on Poverty", the other approach, which is at the other extreme of the absolute approach, is the relative approach. This definition is based on the belief that a definition of poverty must take into consideration along with the physical well-being, the social and psychological well-being. This definition is based on equity and social inclusion and the extent to which inequality in the distribution of income should be tolerated (Ross et al., 2000:6).

In industrialized and rich countries, the income level that is associated with a relative definition of poverty is many times the level required to ensure physical survival. According to Ross et al., a frequent argument against the relative definition of poverty

is that

> a typical poor family in Canada would be wealthy if the family lived in the third world. But poor Canadians do not live in the Third World; they live in communities that have first world living costs and in which wealth surrounds them daily (2000:6).

With regard to measuring poverty, most approaches compromise between the two. In other words, "they attempt to define a basket of goods and services that assures a minimum standard of living which is acceptable in social as well a purely physical terms". (Ross et al., 2000:6).

Canada, like most countries, but unlike the United States, has no official definition of poverty. In fact, different organizations and agencies measure poverty in different ways.

Some of the most important and most recognized are :

-Statistics Canada Low-Income Cut-Offs (LICO).

-Statistics Canada Low-Income Measure (LIM).

-Lines of Income Inequality developed by the Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD).

-Fraser Institute Poverty Lines.

None of these definitions and measurements of poverty are precise or exhaustive. Instead, they are designed as working measures and are founded on various assumptions. However, given the complexity of the problem with regard to defining and measuring poverty - the fact that what constitutes poverty is different from place to place and decade to decade - it can be argued that the only alternative to an inadequate definition is no definition at all (Ross et al., 2000:13).

The Low-Income Cut-offs (LICOs)

The most known and frequently used measure of poverty in Canada is the Statistics Canada's low-income cut-off (LICO). According to Statistics Canada, a low-income cut-off is " an income threshold below which a family is likely to spend significantly more of its income on food, shelter and clothing than the average family". Low-income cut-offs have been produced since the 1960's and "provide a well defined methodology for monitoring the number and composition of those who are less well off than the average". The LICO's, however, are not considered as poverty rates or poverty lines by Statistics Canada, even though some groups choose to use them as such (Statistics Canada, 2001:9).

For Statistics Canada, the starting point for producing the low-income cut-offs was the Family Expenditure Survey (Famex), which was redesigned and renamed the Survey of Household Spending (SHS) in 1997. Both surveys produce family expenditures on different items such as food, shelter and clothing. In fact, the relationship between income and the necessities of food, shelter and clothing is at the center of the low-income cut-offs (Statistics Canada, 2001:10).

According to Statistics Canada, in general, families with high incomes tend to spend a smaller proportion of their income on the necessities. They spend more in terms of dollars than families with lower incomes. However, they spend less as a percentage and have more left over to spend on items that are not necessities.

Table 2 shows the Low-Income cut-offs for the year 2000. Low-Income Cut-offs are produced for seven family sizes and five sizes of area of residence, forming in total a set of 35 cut-offs (2001:10).

Table 2: Statistics Canada's Low-Income Cut-off, 2000 (1992 Base)

Size of household	Size of Area of Residence				
	500,000 +	100,000-499,999	30,000-99,999	< 30,000 urban	rural
1 person	$18,189	$15,600	$15,491	$14,414	$12,569
2 persons	$22,734	$19,500	$19,364	$18,017	$15,711
3 persons	$28,275	$24,252	$24,082	$22,408	$19,540
4 persons	$34,226	$29,356	$29,152	$27,127	$23,653
5 persons	$38,258	$32,815	$32,588	$30,323	$26,440
6 persons	$42,291	$36,275	$36,022	$33,517	$29,228
7 or more	$46,324	$39,735	$39,457	$36,713	$32,015

Source: Statistics Canada, 1999 in Ross et al., 2000:17.

In the report produced by the Statistics Canada's Income Statistics Devision, some important characteristics of the LICO's are discussed.

1-Base Year : the relationship between spending and the families income is associated with a specific point in time, in other words, the year of the expenditure survey used to derive the cut-offs. That particular year is then referred to as the base year for the set of cut-offs, and the most recent base is 1992.

2-Income Reference Year: The low-income cut-offs are updated each year by applying the annual Consumer Price Index (CPI). This takes into account inflation, even though it ignores any changes in the spending patterns of families. For instance, a set of 1998 cut-offs (1992 base) takes into account the inflation between 1992 and 1998, but reflects the spending patterns of 1992 (2001:10).

Statistics Canada Low Income Measure (LIM)

Another measure developed by Statistics Canada is the low income measure or LIM. This measure is not included in the regular and main annual report on incomes in Canada, but is only reported in a smaller separate report. It is currently under review as a replacement for LICO's (Ross et al., 2000:18).

Unlike the low income cut-offs, the LIM is based directly on income. The measure is based on one-half of median gross income, where median income is first adjusted for family size and composition. The methodology and rationale for LIMs are simple and clear: the basis for what constitutes low income is defined relative to the median income of Canadian households only, and Statistics Canada sets the threshold at 50% (Ross et al., 2000:19).

Table 3 : Statistics Canada Low Income Measure, 2000

Family Type	Low Income Measure
One adult	$13,492
One adult, one child	$18,890
Two adults, one child / One adult, two children	$22,937
Two adults, two children / One adult, three children	$26,984
Two adults, three children / One adult, four children	$31,032
Two adults, four children / One adult, five children	$35,079

Source: Statistics Canada , 1999 in Ross et al., 2000:19.

Using a LIM approach to counting the number of poor persons in Canada, rather than the LICO, reduces poverty between two and three percentage points depending on the year. (Ross et al., 2000:19).

Lines of Income Inequality by the Canadian Council on Social Development

Like LIMs, the Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD) low income guidelines are straightforward and they represent a purely relative approach to the definition of poverty. These guidelines are based on average family income as reported by Statistics Canada. The CCSD considers one-half of average income to be the poverty line for a family of 3 members, which is the Canadian average (3.06 family members). The CCSD assigns an individual 50% of the basic three member family, and a family of

two 83%. Families of more than three members are assigned 16.7% for each additional member (Ross et al., 2000:20).

Table 4 : Line of Income Inequality Developed by The Canadian Council On Social Development, 2000

Family Size	Income Level
1 person	$14,530
2 persons	$24,119
3 persons	$29,060
4 persons	$33,912
5 persons	$38,765
6 persons	$43,618
7 persons	$48,471

Source: Canadian Council On Social Development, 2000 in Ross et al., 2000:22.

The CCSD income lines, which were developed by a national task force in 1973, were not intended to be measures of poverty, instead " they were developed to address the problem of severe and persistent income inequality in Canada by defining a minimum standard of income equality for Canadian Families" (Ross et al., 2000:21).

Overtime, a number of voluntary organizations and a few public agencies have regarded CCSD as poverty lines, however, they do not measure poverty or need in the sense of providing estimates of the cost of essentials (Ross et al., 2000:21).

Fraser Institute Poverty Lines

The Fraser Institute (a free-enterprise advocacy organization) has published poverty lines developed by economist Christopher Sarlo. It is a market basket measure. Market Basket measure " claims to be an absolute, once-and-forever, measure which implies that a given real poverty standard can be developed at any point in time and still be relevant decades later. It develops a basket of necessities, and then prices the basket according to location (Ross et al., 2000:22). The market basket includes shelter,

food, clothing, personal hygiene needs, health care, transportation and telephone. The Fraser Institute poverty lines are based more on physical survival than well-being. They are only developed for a number of Canadian Cities, but province-wide poverty lines are prepared, based on weighting the results for the various cities within each province as shown in table 5 (Ross et al., 2000:26).

Table 5 : Fraser Institute Poverty Lines, 2000

	Family Size					
Province	1	2	3	4	5	6
Newfoundland	$8,201	$11,464	$14,732	$17,618	$20,066	$22,507
Prince Edward Island	$7,167	$10,251	$13,937	$17,181	$19,506	$21,824
Nova Scotia	$7,403	$10,511	$13,899	$17,502	$19,797	$22,085
New Brunswick	$7,190	$10,091	$13,252	$15,995	$18,334	$20,667
Quebec	$6,841	$9,855	$12,699	$15,681	$17,960	$20,229
Ontario	$8,145	$11,529	$15,045	$18,603	$20,805	$23,000
Manitoba	$7,021	$10,495	$14,153	$17,585	$19,846	$22,100
Saskatchewan	$6,422	$9,760	$13,049	$16,098	$18,402	$20,700
Alberta	$6,994	$9,991	$13,216	$16,010	$18,158	$20,300
British Columbia	$8,754	$12,117	$16,203	$19,754	$22,130	$24,500
Canada	$7,625	$10,853	$14,220	$17,502	$19,757	$22,006

Source: Fraser Institute, 1996 in Ross et al., 2000:26.

When the Fraser Institute poverty lines are used, extremely low rates are produced. Except the Fraser Institute, there are no known users of them, these lines are not used in measuring poverty in Canada. For those "who want a basic Third World measure of poverty, one that will do little more than provide for the short-term physical survival of a family, these lines are representative of that." (Ross et al., 2000:26). These lines reflect a purely absolute approach which is concerned with only the physical survival of the body and not social and psychological well-being. The lines are drawn up in a way that living standards, according to these lines would only mean day to day survival.

2.3: Evaluation of Poverty Measures

Even though all the measures mentionned examine levels of inequality, low income or well-being, as mentionned earlier, some of them were not intended to measure poverty or are not considered as such. For the purpose of this thesis, the LICOs will be used. Some measures like CCSD were not really constructed to measure povery and the LIM measure is not widely used at the moment. Furthermore, the poverty lines by the Fraser Institute look more at physical survival and take an absolute approach to measure poverty, which is not usually accepted or used in Canadian society. Living at those levels of poverty would mean only physical survival for the families and their children, merely surviving without ensuring their psychological and social well-being. A more detailed critique of this absolute measure of poverty will be provided in the data analysis section.

Even though Canada has no official measure of poverty, the Statistics Canada's measure (LICO) is the best known and most widely used and virtually all other statistics used by other national measures come from Statistics Canada's annual survey of incomes. Even though Statistics Canada does not in any way claim to measure poverty and does not consider LICOs as such a measure, most social policy analysts and politicians regard them as poverty lines (Ross et al., 2000:14).

In this thesis, the LICOs will be considered as low income cut-offs which give an indication of the number of people in low income in Canada and as such, as an indicator of poverty.

3: Theoretical Perspective

3.1: Functionalist Theory

The development of sociology as a discipline was very much tied to a concern about social problems. Sociology emerged largely in response to many social problems in the late 19th century Europe. Some of these issues were a result of political turmoil that followed the French Revolution of 1789, but mostly they were the effects of the industrial revolution (Curran and Renzetti, 1996:6).

Within sociology, different schools of thought emerged. Functionalism or Structural Functionalism is one important theoretical perspective/school of thought in sociology. Functionalism as a separate school only emerged in the course of the 20th century, however functionalist reasoning in itself is much older. Anthony Giddens points out that the origins of Functionalism, in its modern form, are related to the advances made within biology in the late 19th century (1977:96-7).

Biology, more specifically, evolutionary theory, became a major influence among leading schools of social thought. Auguste Comte's work established a rationale for the close relations between biology and sociology and his work was an important influence on functionalist notions which were worked out by Herbert Spencer and by Durkheim. The idea of social evolution played a very significant part in writing of these authors as well as biological analogies to explain the "anatomy and physiology" of social life (Giddens, 1977:96-7).

The founding fathers of sociology tried to explain social phenomena by refering to the examples in the biological realm. For example, Herbert Spencer and Emile Durkheim saw society as an organic whole, in which different practices or subsystems

are " functionally directed towards the persistence of the larger entity in which they are embedded". Therefore, the notion of society as an organic entity became very central to functionalist argument (Baert, 1998:38).

Even though Durkheim's works have been the single most important factor on the development of functionalism in the 20th century, the only significant explicit discussion of "functional explanation" occupy only a few pages in "The Rules of Sociological Method". For example Durkheim, talking about function, says that

> Therefore when one undertakes to explain a social phenomenon the efficient causes which produces it and the function it fulfills must be investigated seperately. We use the word "function" in reference to "end" or "goal" precisely because social phenomena generally do not exist for the usefulness of the results they produce. We must determine whether there is a correspondence between the fact being considered and the general needs of the social organism (1982:123).

Even though Durkheim did not provide an extensive discussion of functionalism, these ideas were incorporated within a distinctive, although loosely knit, school of "structural functionalism" in sociology (Giddens, 1977:97).

Functionalism as a separate school became dominant only after the first world war. It was first introduced by Bronislaw Malinowski and Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown. Both used the label "functionalism" to refer to the theoretical frame of reference that they used, however, Radcliffe Brown used "structural functionalism" to distinguish his argument form Malinowski's (Baert, 1998:40).

Another important sociologist was Talcott Parsons. His writings have played a major part in connecting Durkheim's work to modern functionalism (Giddens, 1977:85). In the course of 1940's and 1950's, Parsons developed his "general theory of action". Central to Parson's general theory of action is the notion of a "system". Parsons argued

that there are three characteristics to any system. First, a system is relatively structured. Second, certain functions need to be fulfilled for a system to survive. Social systems have particular needs or functional prerequisites. Third, social systems change and that change takes place in an ordered fashion (Baert, 1998:49-50).

The above features of the system resemble the functionning of the human body as seen by other functionalists such as Durkheim and their emphasis on order, balance and stability. As mentionned before, references to biology and social evolution were an important foundation of functionalist perspective. According to Giddens,

> The origins of functionalism, in its modern form, are bound up with the advances made within biology in the 19th century. If classical mechanics remained the ideal form of a matured science, biology, and more specifically evolutionary theory, became the more immediate inspiration among leading schools of social thought. (1977:97)

The reference to or the reliance on biological notions is still strong among the functionalists. As Giddens points out, functionalist perspectives became popular under the sway of evolutionary biology. However, if modern functionalism started from a break with evolutionism, there have been very few functionalists that have "abandoned the view that functional analysis in the social sciences shares major logical uniformities with its counterpart in biology." (Giddens, 1977:104)

Functionalists view society as being made up of interrelated parts. These parts are social institutions: the government, the economy, the family and so on. Each of these institutions has a role or a function to play in order to keep the society running smoothly. These institutions operate together to meet the society's basic needs, which are referred to as functional requisites. Functionalist theorists however, are not clear about the number or the precise nature of these sources, but they maintain that these

needs exist in every society and therefore are universal (Curran and Renzetti, 1996:16).

However, there are clear references with regard to the biology and living organisms and the relationship between the parts which provide the basis for modern functionalist thought. These references are central to Durkheim's work and are apparent in his discussion of society:

> It is indeed certain that in the living cell, there are only molecules of crude matter. But they are in association ...the whole does not equal the sum of its parts, it is something different, whose properties differ from those displayed by the parts from which it is formed. (1982:128)

Drawing an analogy from the living organism, Durkheim moves on to a discussion about society, based on the principle that governs living organisms:

> by virtue of this principle, society is not the mere sum of individuals, but the system formed by their association represents a specific reality which has its own characteristics.(1982:129)

Functionalists are concerned about order and stability. The fundamental question that Durkheim focused on was : What makes social order possible? For him, the answer was not rational self-interest as Hobbes or Rousseau had suggested but an underlying set of moral norms which provide the members of society with the shared feeling that they are part of something larger that themselves as individuals. Durkheim referred to this set of moral norms as "Collective Conscience" (Curran and Renzetti, 1996:8). These shared values and norms form the basis of social order and are learned and preserved through interaction with others who advocate them (Alvi et al., 2000:14).

Durkheim talks about collective representation or collective conscience by explaining that in order for these collective representations to become intelligible, the source they derive must be found outside themselves since they cannot constitute a circle

closed in upon itself. He asks the question :

> Either the collective consciousness is floating in a vacuum, as a kind of absolute incapable of being represented, or it is attached to the rest of the world by the intermediary of a substratum on which it consequently depends. On the other hand, of what else can this substratum be composed save the members of society, in the way that they are combined in society. (1982:171).

Durkheim discusses collective conscience and its importance in "The Division of Labour". He observed that through time societies become more complex and differentiated. There is very little division of labour in earlier forms of society and society is kept together by what Durkheim called " Mechanical Solidarity", which is a form of cohesion based on similarity of beliefs and sentiments. However, modern societies are characterized by more complex division of labour which can only be kept together through "organic solidarity" or the cohesion based on interdependence and co-operation of its component parts (Baert, 1998:39).

Durkheim himself says in "The Division of Labour", refering to the importance of the division of labour:

> The collective consciousness weakened and became vaguer as the division of labour developed. It is even because of this progressive indeterminacy that the division of labour becomes the main cause of solidarity (1984:226).

With regard to the function of the division of labour, Durkheim says that "its true functions is to create between two or more people a feeling of solidarity." (1984 17).

Functionalism and social problems

In a well-integrated society, like the human body, each part contributes to the stability of the whole, and functionalists study each part in order to determine the role it plays in the operation of the system as a whole. However, when a part fails, it creates a

problem for the system. These failures or dysfunctions upset the equilibrium of the system and become social problems. Functionalists maintain that anything that impedes the system to achieve its goals which is equilibrium and balance, is by definition a social problem (Widdison and Delaney, 1998:9).

Along with Talcott Parsons, the leading proponents of structural functionalism, for example, Robert Merton and Robert Nisbet, view the social problems in society as being caused by a variety of social factors. First, since the society's institutions are interrelated, a change in one requires changes in all. This in itself does not cause problems for a society if it occurs slowly. However, when the social change is rapid or sudden, society becomes off balance because the institutions have not had time to make the appropriate adjustments. Society becomes disorganized, functional requisites are not met, resulting in various social problems (Currant and Renzetti, 1996:16).

A good example of the above point is Durkheim's view on class conflict and how it would be a short-term problem which will soon become regulated. According to Durkheim, class conflict is a symptom of

> an interim period in social development, where most features of the old form of society have been discarded, but where the ones that are to replace them in the emergent new order have not become fully consolidated. Class conflict declines as the requisite social changes occur, and as they become normatively regulated. (Giddens, 1977:16).

According to Giddens, Durkheim's main argument or thesis is that as class conflict becomes normatively regulated, it also loses its force as a vehicle for social transformation (1977:16). Therefore, class conflict would no longer be a social problem or a problem in the equality of the system. This view of class conflict is diametrically opposed to Marx's view on the importance of class conflict which will be discussed later.

The notion of "classlessness" is related to Durkheim's views on solidarity, in the division of labour, where he argued that as "organic solidarity" develops, "external inequalities", such as differences in inherited status or wealth, become eliminated progressively. Industrial society is still a differentiated society with regard to private property and occupational rewards in the division of labour, however, the place of the individuals in the hierachy is more and more influenced by "internal inequalities" such as differences in talents and innate capacities (Giddens, 1977:17).

Durkheim himself does not devote a lot of time to class conflict in " The Division of Labour". However, he talks briefly about what he calls "Class War", saying that

> The institutions of classes or castes constitute one organization of the division of labour, one that is closely regulated. Yet it is often a source of dissention. Since the lower classes are not, or no longer are, satisfied with the role that has fallen to them ... (1984:310).

As mentionned above, Durkheim's talks about the "internal inequalities", such as differences between capacities and talent : "we are certainly not predestined from birth to any particular form of employment, but we nevertheless possess tastes and aptitudes that limit our choices." (1984:310). Furthermore, speaking of natural abilities, he says that if the institution of class sometimes

> gives rises to miserable squabbling instead of producing solidarity, it is because the distribution of social functions on which it rests does not correspond, or rather no longer corresponds, to the distribution of natural abilities.(1984:311).

The second factor which causes a social problem may be caused by the failure of the individuals to internalize the normative consensus of the society, which results in deviant behavior. Robert Nisbet (1966:5) defines social problems as interruptions

in the socially expected or morally desired scheme of things (Curran and Renzetti, 1996:17).

Structural functionalists argue that social problems can be a result of the society's functional requisites and therefore are not always disruptive of the social system. In fact, social problems can be functional for society (Curran and Renzetti, 1996:17).

Examples of social problems being functional for the society are Kingsley Davis's discussion of the functions of crime and how it highlights the society's moral order and brings members of society together and thus reinforces their social bond. Durkheim does not advocate that social problems should be left unadressed but maintained that some deviation from the norm was inevitable and while it can produce undesirable results, it also serves the positive functions of reaffirming solidarity among the members of the society. However, when the solidarity is weak and there is a lack of social integration, social problems become rampant (Curran and Renzetti, 1996:8).

In fact, functionalists argue that if a social institution or a behavior persists, it must be because it meets some need within the society. For example, even though poverty is not desirable and should be eliminated if possible, Herbert J. Gans in the article " The Uses of Poverty: The Poor Pay All", argues that poverty benefits a significant portion of society and therefore, the incentive to eradicate poverty is neutralized because of specific benefits to the non poor. Some of the functions Gans identified were:

1-Poverty insures that the "dirty work" in society will be done. Poverty in this context is functional because it creates a low-wage labour pool to perform "dirty work" at low cost.

2-Poverty creates jobs for a number of professions and occupations that serve or "service" the poor or protect the society from them, such as social workers, prison staff and police.

3-The poor buy goods that others don't, therefore, increasing the economic usefulness of goods such as day-old bread, vegetables and fruits that otherwise had to be thrown out or second hand clothes and cars (Widdison and Delaney, 1998:16).

Another structural functionalist argument with regard to the inequality in society and the unequal distribution of wealth in society is that an unequal distribution of social rewards is necessary for the maintenance of the society as we know it. Therefore, a system of unequal rewards is central and important because it motivates people to take the more difficult jobs in society (Curran and Renzetti, 1996:109).

With regard to Durkheim's view on poverty and inequality, Durkheim's primary concern was with the relation of the individual to society and he did not concern himself directly with inequality (Synnott, 1996:118). However, in the "The Division of Labour In Society", he says that

> employment in the public sector is increasingly thrown open freely to every body, with no stipulation as to wealth. Lastly, even this ultimate inequality, which springs from the fact that the rich and the poor exist by birth, without disappearing completely, is at least somewhat mitigated. Society strives to reduce it as as much as possible, by helping in various ways those placed in too disadvantageous a situation, and by assisting them to move out of it (1984:314).

Durkheim believed that some inequality is functional and natural in society, pointing out that the division of unequal labour will function to increase solidarity if "society is constituted in a way that social inequalities express precisely natural inequalities." (1984:313). However, he maintained that too much inequality may be

dysfunctional for solidarity because it leads to injustice and civil conflict (Synnott, 1996:118).

As mentionned before, Durkheim does not advocate that social problems or inequalities should be ignored, instead he maintained that some deviation from the norm is inevitable and reaffirms a sense of social solidarity among a society's members (Curran and Renzetti, 1996:8).

Functionalism has faced a long debate about its merits and its shortcomings, although not with the same intensity over the years. According to Giddens, " it would be difficult to claim that the controversy has lost its vigour..., rather new types of theoretical approach have emerged into prominence and have caused the focus of the debate to move elsewhere." (1977:97).

One major criticism, according to Giddens, which later became the focal point to the debate is that functionalist perspective allows no mode of approaching problems of power, conflict and so on (1977:97). However, he concentrates on the popularity or the enduring allure of functionalism. He asks the question: what has drawn so many to functionalist approaches and notions over the years? His answer is that even though the modern period of functionalism begins from a break with evolutionism, very few functionalists have abandoned the notion that there are similitudes between functional analysis in the social sciences and biology (1977:104-5).

There are three main factors that have led to connecting the social sciences to biology. The first is simply the wish to show that there is a logical unity between the social and natural sciences. The second, is the belief that it is necessary to see forms of social organization as integrated unities of interdependent parts. "Interdependence"

refers to a reciprocal effect, "a modification that affects one part will tend to have repercussions on other parts, and finally returns on influence the initial source of modification itself." (Giddens, 1977:97) The last factor, is that social systems manifest a " hidden teleology" that operates through unintended consequences of social action. In order words, there are "social needs" which have to be met so that the society can have a continuing existence (Giddens, 1977:104-5).

Giddens adds a fourth factor, which is different because it is based on idealogical persuasion and is close to the center of the functionalism debate. This refers to the conventional claim that functional notions are associated with "conservatism" in politics. He points that from Comte to Spencer to Durkheim to Parsons, Functionalist ideas have appeared along with a rejection of radical politics in favor of the reconciliation of progress with order (1977:105).

Robert Merton noted in " Social Theory" (1968), that a common critique of functionalism was its conservative bias, acknowledging that early functionalism tended towards interpretations that legitimized the existing order, but denying that this tendency was intrinsic to functionalism. The early functionalists had these conservative conclusions because their analysis was limited to the identification of positive effects for the society (Baert, 1998:57).

Functionalism came under severe criticism from the late 60's onwards : part of this criticism can be explained by the changing political climate of the time. In that period of political radicalization, academics and students became dissatisfied with the idealogical bias in functionalism, as a school became synonymous with justifying the existing order and was to be abandoned. Furthermore, sociologists became dissatisfied with the

functionalist neglect of agency or the ability of people to intervene in the course of events (Baert, 1998:59).

Other critics point out that the functionalist paradigm's view of society as comprehensible, orderly and typically stable and by focusing attention on unity and social stability, it glosses over divisions based on age, social class, race, gender and ethnicity. Furthermore, down playing such divisions can generate tensions and conflict (Macionis et al., 1999:13).

By focusing on consensus and order, functionalists overlook many sources of divisiveness and strain in society. The divisions in society along lines such as social class, gender and ethnicity, rather than producing harmony, equilibrium and consensus, generate tension, conflict and at times social unrest and violence (Curran and Renzetti, 1996:17).

Another criticism is that in trying to look at which functions specific social problems may serve, functionalists fail to ask for whom these problems are functional. Functionalists appear to down play or overlook the fact that only small groups benefit, while many others suffer from these problems (Curran and Renzetti, 1996:18).

One other criticism is that functionalists are complacent about social problems. Structural functionalists appear to be saying that social problems are inevitable, therefore, the best sociologists can do is to identify these problems, explain why they exist and what are their consequences- both functional and dysfunctional- for the social system as a whole. However, some argue that this vision of the role of the sociologist with regard to the study of social problems is too limited and sociologists should have a more activist role (Curran and Renzetti, 1996:18). This view is reflected in the following sociological

perspective : Conflict Theory.

3.2: Conflict Theory

The sociological perspective known as Conflict Theory is mostly based on the writings of the classical social theorist Karl Marx as well as the work of such contemporary theorists such as C. Wright Mills (Curran and Renzetti, 1996:18).

The social-conflict paradigm is a " framework for building theory based on the assumption that society is a complex system characterized by inequality and conflict that generate social change." (Macionis et al., 1999:13)

The first proponents of a systematic conflict theory were Marx and Engels. In 1848, they wrote "The Communist Manifesto". The Communist Manifesto begins with their interpretation of world history as a struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed and resulting in the class struggle between the bourgeoisie, who are the owners of the means of production, the capitalists and the workers or the proletariat (Synnott, 1996:54). They say that :

> The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. For man and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the struggling classes...
>
> Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, shows, however, this distinctive feature: it has simplified the class antagonisms. Society as whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: bourgeoisie and proletariat (1965:65).

Speaking about the bourgeoisie, Marx and Engels say that "it has agglomerated population, centralized means of production, and has concentrated prop-

perty in a few hands. The necessary consequence of this was political centralization". (1965:65).

Furthermore, they argue that " but not only has the bourgeoisie forged the weapons that bring death to itself, it has also called into existence the men who are to wield those weapons-the modern working class-the proletarians". (1965:68).

Marx and Engels point out that the bourgeoisie, i.e. the capital and the proletariat develop in the same proportion. They describe the proletariat, the modern working class, as a "class of labourers, who live only as long as they find work, and who find work, and who find work only so long as their labor increases capital". Furthermore, these laborers, are exposed to all vicissitudes of competition, as well as all the fluctuations of the market (1965:68-9).

They predict that the bourgeoisie is producing "its own grave-diggers" and that "its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable." (1965:79).

According to Marx and Engels, the immediate aim of the communists, defined by them as a working-class party is the "formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat." (1965:81).

The distinguishing feature of communism is the abolition of bourgeois property which is the most complete expression of the system of producing and appropriating products " that is based on class antagonisms, on the exploitation of the many by the few." They sum up the theory of the communists in a single phrase : abolition of private property (Marx and Engels, 1965:82).

Even though contemporary societies are very different from the 1840's, the ideals

of Marx still inspire the social democrats, the labour movements and the socialists. Even though, society has changed but oppression and class struggle persist (Synnott, 1996:54).

The social philosophers adhering to the conflict perspective see life and all social interactions as a struggle for privilege and power. In this view, every person and every group is in competition for valued and scarce resources. Unlike the functionalists who view the elements of a society as harmoniously working together and contributing to the whole, conflict theorists see all the parts as being in competition with each other. The guiding principle of social life are seen as disequilibrium and change, not harmony and equilibrium (Widdison and Delaney, 1998:10).

Conflict theorists begin with the observation that society is characterized by inequality, in other words, our society is arranged in such a way that rewards and resources are distributed unevenly among people. This inequality, in turn, gives rise to social conflict. This inequality has serious consequences in the lives of the individuals and most people suffer from the effects of inequality, while a few benefit from it. The latter group, those at the top of the social class hierarchy, also use their greater political and economical resources and power to preserve their advantageous position (Curran and Renzetti, 1996:18). In fact, Marx and Engels saw political power as " the organized power of one class for oppressing another." (1965:95).

Conflict Theory and Social Problems

The conflict theoretical model emphasizes the fact that key resources such as privilege and power are limited and are distributed inequally among the groups or members in society. Therefore, conflict is an inevitable and natural result of various

groups persuing their values and interests (Widdison and Delaney, 1998:11).

Conflict theorists argue that whether people are aware of it or not, they are enmeshed in a basic struggle for survival and power. Each group in society tries to achieve gains for itself at the expense of other groups. This constant conflict over limited resources threatens order and social peace (Widdison and Delaney, 1998:10).

These conflicting interests should be carefully considered when defining social problems since what the powerful perceive as a problem may be viewed differently by the powerless. Therefore, a basic question of the conflict theorists is : who benefits and who loses from any given social arrangement or condition? (Curran and Renzetti, 1996:18).

The conflict theorists see social problems as natural and inevitable result of groups in society, struggling to survive and gain control over things that can affect their ability to survive. Those who are in power exploit their position and in the process create poverty, oppression, discrimination and crime (Widdison and Delaney, 1998:11).

In conflict theory, social problems are seen as a symptom of a much larger societal malaise and in order to understand and eliminate these problems, we need to understand the basic conflicts that are producing them; the real problems stemming from being exploited, which leads to powerlessness, alienation and isolation. Conflict theorists view these problems as the product of a capitalist system that alienate the worker (Widdison and Delaney, 1998:11).

As Marx and Engels said in " The Communist Manifesto":

> The history of all past society has consisted in the development of class antagonisms, antagonisms that assumed different forms at different epoches. But whatever form they may have taken, one fact is common to

all past ages, the exploitation of one part of society by the other". (1965:92)

To study the basis of social problems, sociologists must look at the distribution of privilege and power in society, because these two factors are at the center of conflicting interests and values (Widdison and Delaney, 1998:11).

In the conflict perspective, there is no need or no "function" with regard to poverty and inequality, conflict theory takes the stance that no one need to be poor, but poverty exists because there is a severe concentration of wealth that assist the rich to accumulate ever greater assets. Furthermore, the economic structure is unchanging and is far from being an environment in which rapid upward mobility is possible. The poor are trapped not because they lack ambition, but because of the constraints of a society, in which jobs as well as access to institutional resources and rewards are limited (Curran and Renzetti, 1996:110).

Furthermore, poverty exists because the middle and upper class want to be rich. The working poor are exploited : they are paid low wages so their employers can make profits. The unemployed are also victims of the same system. Thus, the conflict theorists argue that the economic system of capitalist countries creates and perpetuates a high degree of economic inequality (Coleman and Cressey, 1990:183).

Marx himself talks about the unemployed and the role of the unemployment in capitalism. The existence of a group of chronically unemployed, the industrial "reseve army" is necessary to capitalism. Marx introduces the concept of the reserve army, which he sometimes calls "relative surplus population".

> The industrial reserve army, whose ranks are filled mainly by workers who become redundant through mechanisation, acts as a constant depressant upon wages. During periods of prosperity, when the demand for labour

> increases; part of the reserve army becomes absorbed into the labour force, and thus holds wages down and in other times, it provides a potential source of cheap labour which inhibits any attempt of the working to improve their lot. (Giddens, 1971:56).

As mentionned before, Marx and Engels argued that the solution to inequality and class conflict is the formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrowing of the bourgeois supremacy and conquest of political power by the proletariat (1965:81).

Marx predicted that capitalists would not voluntarily relinquish control of the economic system that generates massive inequality in standard of living and wealth. They would be willing to use force in order to prevent social change. On the other hand, the workers would come to see the revolutionary violence as being the only solution in order to create a radically transformed and a more egalitarian and socialist society. The result would be the revolution of the working class, which the workers would win eventually (Alvi et al., 2000:10).

The socialist revolution Marx promoted and predicted did not happen, at least not in advanced capitalist societies. Despite Marx's prediction, capitalism and workers in industrialist capitalist societies have not overthrown capitalism. Some of the reasons are :

1-The fragmentation of the capitalist class: today, stockholders instead of single families typically own large companies.

2-A higher standard of living. Most of today's white-collar workers do not think of themselves as "industrialist proletariat". Furthermore, the average income has gone up over the past century. People typically perceive themselves better off than their parents and grand parents.

3-More extensive work organization. Workers have organizational strengths they lacked a century ago, for example, labour unions that can make demands by using threats such as strikes.

4-More extensive legal protections. During the last century, the government enacted laws made the work place safer and devised programs, such as unemployment insurance and pensions rights provide workers with greater security (Macionis et al., 1999:161-2).

However, Marx' s analysis has had enormous influence on sociological thinking in Canada and elsewhere in recent decades. But the Marxist view has also been criticized. One key criticism is that it disregards a crucial element of the Davis-Moore Thesis : motivating people to various social roles requires a system of unequal rewards. Marx, however, separated reward from performance, endorsing an egalitarian system based on the principle " from each according to ability, to each according to need". Even though Marx's view may be noble, critics point out, severing rewards from performance yields low productivity (Macionis et al, 1999:161).

The conflict paradigm has also been criticized on a number of issues, namely, concentrating mainly on conflict and power struggles. One criticism is that because this paradigm highlights power struggles, it neglects how social interdependence and shared values generate unity among members of a society (Macionis et al, 1999:14). The theory's focus on change and conflict exaggerates their importance in the overall workings of the social system while overlooking the significance of order, stability and consensus (Curran and Renzetti, 1996:19).

Another criticism is with regard to conflict theory's lack of scientific objectivity in certain circumstances. For instance, to the extent that the conflict approach

explicitly pursues political goals for more egalitarian society, it forfeits any claim to scientific objectivity (Macionis et al, 1999:14). The conflict theorists' emphasis on advocacy for the oppressed causes can lead them to forgo objectivity in their work, and make them exclude alternative points of view (Curran et al, 1996:19).

Finally, one criticism that applies to both conflict theory and functionalist theory is that they are macro-level theories and do not take into account every day experiences. Both perspectives study social problems at the macro-level; they conceptualize society in abstract, broad terms and emphasize the role of social structures in shaping social life. There is nothing wrong with such approach, but it is incomplete (Curran et al., 1996:19).

3.3: The Feminist Theory

The feminist paradigm is a conflict theory of society and social problems. Since the 1960's, a growing number of sociologists have made important feminist contributes to the study of social problems, putting gender and patriarchy at the forefront of analyses of social problems (Alvi et al, 2000:19).

Feminism is the advocacy of social equality for the sexes, in opposition to patriarchy and sexism. Feminism views the personal experiences of men and women through the lens of gender. In other words, how we think of ourselves (gender identity), how we act (gender roles) and our gender's social standing (gender stratification) are all rooted in the operation of society, according to the feminist paradigm (Macionis et al, 1999:248).

Feminists support some general principles :

1-The need for change : feminists thinking is activist-oriented and political. Feminism

is critical of the status quo, advocating social equality for women and men.

2-Expanding human choice. Feminists argue that the traditional conceptions of gender limit the range of human qualities, diving them into opposite spheres. Feminists propose, as an alternative a "reintegration of humanity" so that each person develops all human traits.

3-Eliminating gender stratification. Feminism opposes cultural norms and laws that limit the education, income and job opportunities of women (Macionis et al., 1999:248).

With regard to social problems, there is no united feminist perspective on social problems. However, the feminist perspective can be distinguished from other perspectives based on the following shared attributes :

-Gender and power are key elements of social problems.

-Gender inequality is viewed as the major cause of the continued oppression and marginalization of women.

-Gender and gender relations order social institutions and social life in fundamental ways.

-Women should be at the center of the study of social problems (Alvi et al., 2000:19).

However, there are variants of the feminist theory and each one takes a different approach to understanding gender issues and social problems. Four widely accepted perspectives are: liberal feminism, marxist feminism, radical feminism and socialist feminism.

1-**Liberal feminism** - is the most widely recognized feminist theory in North America. Liberal feminists argue that women are discriminated against based on their sex, so they are denied access to the same financial and career opportunities as men. They

assert that this problem can be solved by removing all obstacles to women's access to education and paid employment, and having women participate equally with men in the public sphere (Alvi et al., 2000:20). Liberal feminism endorses greater rights for women and strives to eliminate the discrimination and prejudice that block the aspirations of women (Macionis et al., 1999:249).

2-**Marxist feminism**- Marxist feminists argue that class and gender division of labour determine female and male positions in society. However, the gender division of labour is seen as the product of the class divisions of labour. The main strategy of change is the transformation from a capitalist society to a democratic socialist society (Alvi et al., 2000:20).

3-**Radical feminism**- radical feminists see male privilege and power as the "root cause" of all social relations, social problems and inequality. Some strategies for change are overthrowing patriarchal relations, and creating women-centered social institutions and women-only organizations (Alvi et al., 2000:20).

4-**Socialist feminism** - it evolved with the idea of Marx and Engels. From this view, capitalism intensifies patriarchy by concentrating wealth and power in the hands of a small number of men. They argue that the bourgeois family fostered by capitalism must change and the key to this goal is a social revolution that creates a democratic state-centered economy to meet needs of all (Macionis et al., 1999:249). Socialist feminism contains some elements of marxist and radical feminism. For instance, patriarchy and class are considered key variables in analyses of social problems. Neither class nor patriarchy is presumed to be dominant. Instead, gender and class relations are equally important and interact to determine the social order. They contend that we are influenced by

both gender and class relations and therefore, the strategies for change would focus simultaneously on transforming patriarchal and class relations (Alvi et al., 2000:20).

Feminist theory, like other theoretical perspectives has been criticized. For example, radical feminist theories have been referred to as single-factor explanations which have very little explanatory value in social science. Furthermore, theories of patriarchy are sometimes seen as political agendas instead of social scientific theories (Alvi et al., 2000:21).

Left-wing scholars have also criticized radical feminist theories for assuming a "universal dimension of men's power". Some sociologists charge that feminism ignores a growing body of evidence that men and women do think and act differently (which undermines the goal of gender equality). Furthermore, other criticism is that with its drive to enhance women's presence in the work place, feminism has denigrated the unique and crucial contribution women make to the development of the children in the first years of life (Macionis et al., 1999:250).

Despite the above criticism, feminist scholars have made many important contributions to the sociological study of social problems in terms of providing a much needed challenge to the ways in which "male-stream" sociologists think about the subject of their research and their research subject (Alvi et al., 2000:21).

Having presented the three theoretical perspectives in this section, the next part examines some of the factors related to child poverty. At the end, there will be an analysis of which theories are better supported by the data and which ones help better explain the various factors with regard to poverty.

4. Data Presentation and Analysis

4.1: Distribution of Income in Canada

In order to look at poverty, its scope and the factors associated with living in poverty, we have to first have an understanding of the total distribution of income is needed.

Table 6 : Market Income Share by Quintile, 1981, 1989 and 1997

Market Income Quintile	Families			Unattached Individuals			All Households		
	1981	1989	1997	1981	1989	1997	1981	1989	1997
Bottom	3.5%	3.0%	2.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%	1.5%	1.2%	0.6%
Second	12.3%	11.4%	10.1%	5.2%	5.3%	3.7%	9.7%	8.7%	7.3%
Middle	18.7%	18.0%	17.7%	15.5%	15.5%	14.7%	17.9%	16.9%	16.1%
Fourth	25.3%	25.1%	25.8%	28.1%	28.0%	26.5%	26.5%	26.0%	26.5%
Highest	40.2%	42.5%	44.3%	51.1%	51.2%	55.1%	44.4%	47.2%	49.5%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Statistics Canada, 1999 in Ross et al., 2000:58.

The table 6, (based on Statistics Canada's Survey of Consumer Finances microdata), presents the distribution of relative income. In 1981, among families, the top quintile received about 11 times the share of market income as did the bottom quintile. However, in 1997, the top quintile families received 21 times the market share, compared to bottom quintile families. Furthermore, the second and middle quintiles both received smaller shares in 1997 compared to 1981. Their losses were captured by the top quintile. The same situation applies to unattached individuals and all households as well (Ross et al., 2000:57).

We have to take into consideration that when interpreting the changes in shares in the table, a shift of a single percentage point may not seem important. However, with Canada's 1997 disposable household income of $466 billion, each percentage point

represents a share of income equal to about $4.7 billion (Ross et al., 2000:58).

The above data confirm that the distribution of income is becoming more polarized. Middle-income groups have less of the total economic pie, which is reflected in their declining share of market income. Furthermore, the actual size of the middle class is also shrinking. The center column of the table below represents the proportion of middle-income households, that are those with income between 75 and 125% of median income. The size of the middle-income group decreased between 1981 and 1989 by five percentage points. The percentage fell again by about one percent (Ross et al., 2000:59).

Table 7 :Proportion Falling between 75% and 125% of Median Disposable Income, All households, 1981, 1989 and 1997

Year	Incomes less than 75% of median income (lower income)	Incomes between 75% and 125% of median income (middle income)	Incomes over 125% of median income (upper income)	Median income (1997 $)
1981	33.2%	32.9%	33.9%	$39.115
1989	35.5%	27.9%	36.6%	$35.015
1997	35.1%	27.1%	37.8%	$31.793

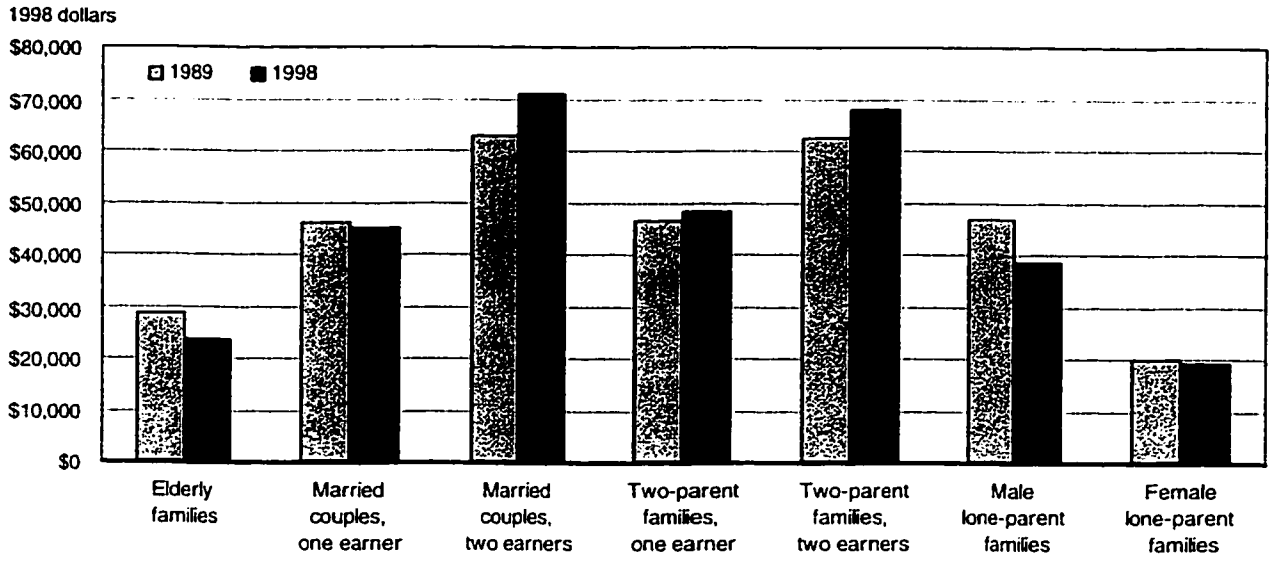
Source: Statistics Canada, 1999 in Ross et al., 2000:59.

According to Statistics Canada, Market income includes the earnings received from labour force participation as well as investment and private pension income. For the majority of Canadians, money from employment constitutes a high proportion of labour market income. In 1998, 87.4% of aggregate market income for Canadian families came from employment and therefore labour market income is closely tied to the economy (2000:9).

The average labour market income for Canadian families of two or more was $55,224 in 1998, up 4.7% from the previous year after adjusting for inflation (measured by changes in the Consumer Price Index). In fact, the 1998 estimate was the

first time the average labour market income of families surpassed the peak reached in 1989 which was $54,508. The average labour market income has increased by 12% from the 1993 recessionary trough when it was at $49,329 (Statistics Canada, 2000:9).

Chart 1 : Average Labour Market Income of families in 1989 and 1998

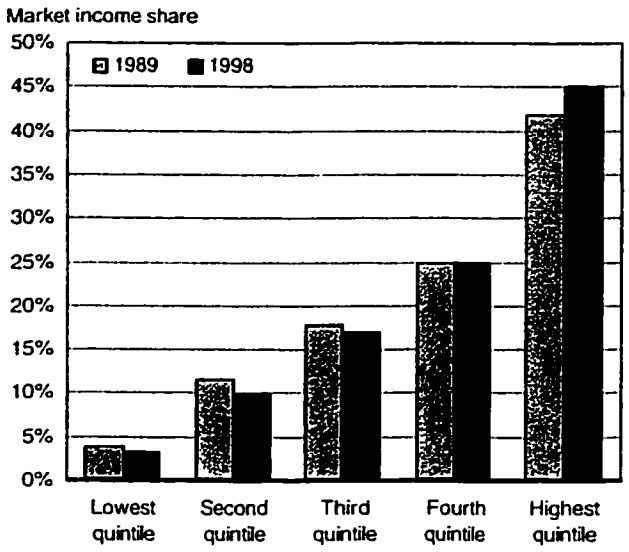


Source: Statistics Canada, 2000:10.

The chart 1, produced by Statistics Canada shows that virtually all major family types registered increases in 1998 however some still fell well short of their market income level in 1989. For example, male lone-parent families earned $38,560 in 1998, up 8.3% from 1997 but still 17.7% below the average a decade earlier. Female lone-parent families averaged $19,242 in 1998, which was 4.4% less than 1989. Moreover, the number of families headed by a female lone-parent increased by over a quarter during the decade, to reach 580,000 in 1989 (2000:11).

According to Statistics Canada, despite recent strong economic performance, income disparities have continued to grow, as the next chart shows (2000:11).

Chart 2 : The shift of The Share of Labour Market Income Toward the Highest Income Families Between 1989 and 1998



Source: Statistics Canada, 2000:11.

In 1998, average market income for Canadian families in the top 20% of the income scale, was $124,681, about 14 times higher than families in the bottom 20%. Furthermore, Canadian families in the bottom 20% received only 3.1% of aggregate market income, compared to 45.2% of those in the top 20%. When compared with 1989, only families in the top quintile have actually increased their share of aggregate market income. In fact, the fourth quintile broke even, however, the middle and lower quintiles lost ground (Statistics Canada, 2000:11).

The gap between the rich and the poor is important with regard to poverty and low income. Whether the growing gap between rich and poor becomes a permanent feature of the Canadian society and economy remains to be seen. It is an important question, however, in some respects, it detracts from the causes as well as the solutions to poverty, suggesting that nothing can be done about inequality and poverty. However, the depth and scope of poverty in Canada suggest that "much needs to be done to ensure

that all Canadians share in the country's great wealth" (Ross et al., 2000:59).

4.2: Low Income in Canada

According to Statistics Canada, a person in low income is someone "whose family income falls below Statistics Canada's low income cutoffs. The cutoffs reflect an income level at which a family is likely to spend significantly more of its income on food, shelter and clothing than the average family." (2000:181). The findings below are based on the Statistics Canada's Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID) 1998.

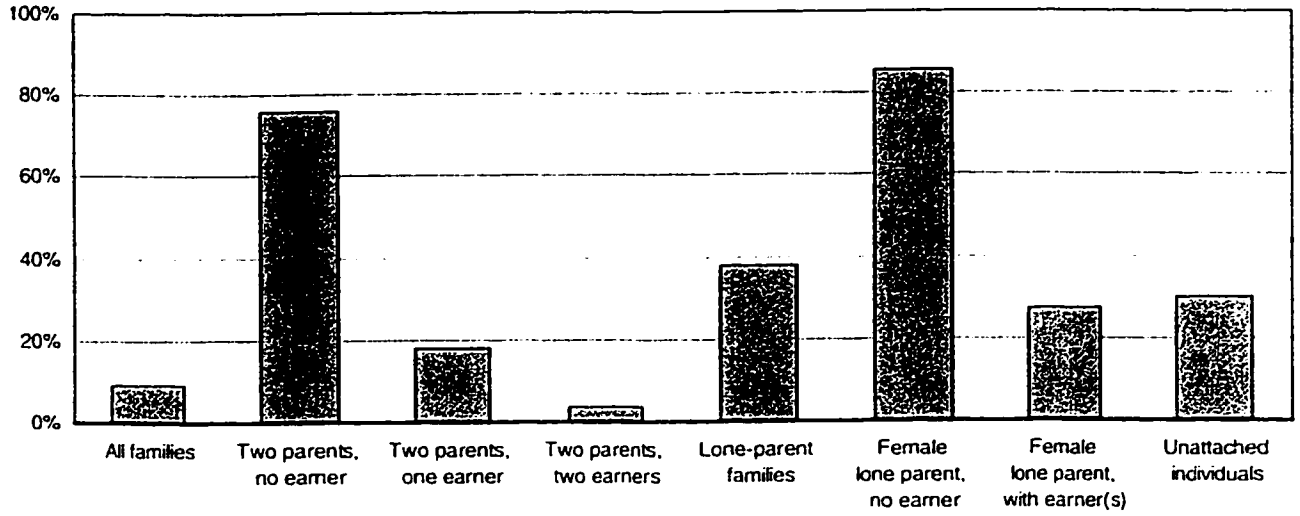
Statistics Canada reported that an estimated 752,000 families were in low income in 1998, down from 852,000 in 1997. The low income rate also declined, from 10.3% in 1997 to 9.1% in 1998, which was the lowest rate for economic families since 1990 (8.5%) (2000:181).

Even though the low income rate dropped, the financial situation of families that were below the low income cut off in 1998 did not show improvement, compared to the previous year. For example, families with low income would have needed an additional $6,638 on average in after-tax dollars to reach the low income cutoff. In relative terms, the gap was 32,1%. However, in 1997, the income gap for low income families averaged $6,404 or 30.5%. Therefore, while the low income rate fell, the situation of the families below the line actually worsened slightly in 1998 (Statistics Canada, 2000:181). Earnings have a marked effect on the low income gap. For example, families with no earners- lone-parent or two-parent- would have needed an extra 40% , on average to reach the low income cutoff. In comparison, female single mothers who worked had an average low income gap of 24.0%. For the estimated 72,000 families with children who were in low income despite the presence of two earners, the average

gap was 19.7% (Statistics Canada, 2000:182).

Chart 3, from the Statistics Canada, shows the impact and the importance of earner(s) with regard to low income (2000:182).

Chart 3 : Low Income and the Number of earners in Different Family Types



Source: Statistics Canada, 2000:182.

With regard to children, according to Statistics Canada, about 1,004,000 children in 1998 were in low-income, down 14% (from 1,168,000) in 1997. The proportion of children living in low income has fallen since 1996, when it peaked at 17.4%. The rate then fell to 16.5% in 1997 and 14.2% in 1998 (2000:182).

Another organization, the National Council of Welfare, also presents data on poverty in Canada. The latest report , " Poverty Profile 1998", uses the 1998 SLID survey, (Survey Of Labour and Income Dynamics) by Statistics Canada. However, according to the National Council of Welfare, some figures differ slightly than those published by Statistics Canada, because of exclusion of records with extremely high values for sources of income. Their inclusion inflate the income estimates (2000:3).

Another major difference is that even though the National Council of Welfare uses the Low Income Cutoffs calculated by the Statistics Canada, they refer to them as poverty lines, despite the Statistics Canada insistence that they are not poverty lines and do not measure poverty. For example, The Council reported that a total of 4.9 million people or 16.4% of the people in Canada were poor in 1998, which was 1.4 million or 41% more than in 1989, the last full year before the last recession (2000:1).

In spite of talk by governments about putting children first, approximately one in five children in Canada, or 1.3 million were living in poverty in 1998. This represented an increase of roughly 400,000 or 42 % since 1989, which was the year the House of Commons passed a resolution to end child poverty by 2000 (National Council of Welfare, 2000:1).

Like Statistics Canada, the National Council of Welfare reported a decrease in poverty or low-income. For the first time since 1994, fewer than five million children, women and men in Canada were living in poverty. However, they point out that we should hardly be celebrating, since "the small drop in poverty was a dismal showing for a wealthy country in its seventh consecutive year of economic growth." (2000:1).

However, we have to take into account that talking about poverty by using a single figure such as a rate or a percentage does not provide a complete picture of the extent and severity of poverty among different groups and across the provinces. Therefore, this has to be taken into consideration and the poverty figures for different groups have to be presented .

With the exception of seniors, Canadians have had limited success in tackling the causes and consequences of poverty. Furthermore, the causes and consequences of

poverty are changing. For example, the growth in poverty among young families has become a startling development of the past two decades. Furthermore, the barriers to increased economic self-reliance remains very high among groups that have always struggled with economic disadvantages such as persons with disabilities, lone-parent families and aboriginal peoples (Ross et al., 2000:61).

An aggregate figure often hides as much as it reveals. For example, the overall poverty rate for Canadian families was 14.0 % in 1997. However, there are important variations with respect to this rate across different groups. For example, younger families now have a greater risk of poverty, particularly those headed by a lone-parent. Aboriginal peoples have suffered historically severe economic disadvantage which is reflected in persistently high rates of poverty. Therefore, it is very important to look behind an overall poverty rate to understand the face of poverty (Ross et al., 2000:69). In order to do this, low income and poverty will be presented for different groups.

4.3: Factors Related to Poverty in Canada

Family Type

The type of family a person lives in is very important with regard to the incidence of low income and poverty. For example, single mother families have higher poverty rates than two parent families. Furthermore, families headed by younger heads have usually higher poverty rates than those whose head is older. The above examples will be discussed in later sections.

Two-parent families present the more typical family in Canada. Poor families comprised of couples with children account for one-third of all poor families.

Table 8 :Comparison of poor and non-poor non-elderly two-parent families, Distribution by age, education and weeks employed, 1997

	Non-poor	Total Poor	Working Poor	Other Poor
Total (thousands)	2,762	378	210	168
Average number of children < 7 years	0.71	0.90	0.88	0.93
Average number of children < 18 years	1.84	2.01	2.04	1.97
Characteristic	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Age (a)				
< 35	22.6%	31.3%	26.0%	38.0%
35-64	77.4%	68.7%	74.0%	62.0%
Education (b)				
Less than high school graduate	17.8%	31.5%	27.1%	37.0%
High school grad./Some post-secondary	25.7%	27.2%	29.4%	24.4%
Post-secondary cert., diploma / Univ. degree	56.5%	41.3%	43.4%	38.6%
Weeks employed				
full year	95.3%	55.6%	100.0%	0.0%
some	4.0%	25.0%	0.0%	56.4%
none	0.7%	19.3%	0.0%	43.6%

Source: Statistics Canada, 1999 in Ross et al., 2000:71.

The age profile of poor couples with dependent children is relatively close to that of non-poor families for those aged 35 to 64. Roughly two-thirds of poor two-parent families and three-quarters of non-poor two-parent families are between the age of 35 and 64. However, the differences between the poor and non-poor is more pronounced for those who are less than 35 years old (31.3% versus 22.6%). Other notable differences between the poor and the non-poor are found with respect to education. The share of poor two-parent families with less than a high school education is substantially higher than the non-poor families. However, four out of ten poor two-parent families have a post-secondary diploma, certificate or degree. Furthermore, not surprisingly, non-poor two-parent families with children are more likely to have full-year employment than poor two-parent families (Ross et al., 2000:71-2).

The National Council of Welfare also points out that while the poverty statistics

for all persons give a good overview of poverty, it is more revealing to look at poor people in terms of different family types. The four main types of families are married couples where the head of the family is 65 or older, married couples under 65 with children under 18, married couples under 65 without children under 18, and single-parent mothers under 18 (2000:15).

Poverty in Children

Most poor children live in a family that includes two-parents, one or two children, and one or two parents in late 30's that have at least graduated from high school (Ross et al., 2000:73).

Both the number and percentage of dependent children under the age of 18 living in low-income families increased between 1981 and 1997 (although it decreased slightly in 1998). Since 1989, the number of children in poverty has grown by 467,000. The child poverty rate peaked in 1993 (at 21.3%) and has since stayed near the 20 percent mark, five to six percentage points higher than in 1989 (Ross et al., 2000:72).

Table 9: Rate, Number and Distribution of poor children, 1981, 1989 and 1997.

	1981		1989		1997	
Rate (%)	14.9%		14.4%		19.9%	
Children (thousands)	964		922		1,389	
	Number (thousands)	Distribution	Number (thousands)	Distribution	Number (thousands)	Distribution
Characteristic		100.0%		100.0%		100.0%
Family type						
Non-elderly						
Couple with children < 18	625	64.9%	523	56.7%	758	54.6%
Lone parent with children < 18	316	32.8%	374	40.6%	601	43.2%
Other	22	2.3%	25	2.7%	30	2.2%
Family employment						
full year	402	41.7%	375	40.7%	542	39.0%
some	300	31.2%	252	27.3%	345	24.8%
none	262	27.2%	295	32.0%	503	39.0%

Source: Statistics Canada, 1999 in Ross et al., 2000:72.

The above figures show that the proportion of poor children living in two-parent families decreased from 1981 to 1997 from 64.9% to 54.6%. The share of poor children living in families with full-year employment or working-poor families fell slightly, however, their absolute number increased by 140,000 between 1981 and 1997. As a result, poverty is becoming increasingly concentrated among children living in families with little or no employment income (Ross et al., 2000:73).

Child poverty rates are a reflection of parental poverty rates. They tend to fall and rise as economic conditions improve or deteriorate. The most striking difference each year is the huge difference between the poverty rates for children in two-parent families and the rates for children living in single mother families . The national poverty rate for children fell from 20.3 % in 1997 to 18.8% in 1998 (Cf. Table 10). The number of poor children fell from 1,439,000 to 1,327,000, as seen on the table on the next page (National Council of welfare, 2000:11).

Table 10 : Poverty Trends, Children Under 18

	Poor Children	All Children	Poverty Rate
1990	1,105,000	6,522,000	16.9%
1991	1,210,000	6,606,000	18.3%
1992	1,218,000	6,704,000	18.2%
1993	1,415,000	6,799,000	20.8%
1994	1,334,000	6,997,000	19.1%
1995	1,441,000	7,011,000	20.5%
1996	1,481,000	7,093,000	20.9%
1997	1,439,000	7,081,000	20.3%
1998	1,327,000	7,052,000	18.8%

Source: National Council of Welfare, 2000:11.

Poverty Across Provinces

There are also important differences with regard to child poverty rate across provinces. As the table below shows, the national poverty rate for children slightly fell from 20.3 % in 1997 to 18.8% in 1998, and the number of poor children went from 1,439,000 to 1,327,000. The lowest provincial child povery rate in 1998 was 11.1 % in Prince Edward Island, and the highest was 24.5% in Newfoundland. Between 1997 and 1998, the poverty rates for children decreased in every province except in Newfoundland. (National Council of Welfare, 2000:86-7).

Table 11 : Children Under 18 Living in Poverty, 1998

	Poor Children in All Family Types		Poor Children of Two-Parent Families under 65		Poor Children of Single-Parent Mothers under 65	
	Number of Children	Poverty Rate	Number of Children	Poverty Rate	Number of Children	Poverty Rate
Newfoundland	30,000	24.5%	18,000	17.7%	11,000	74.5%
Prince Edward Island	4,000	11.1%	sample too small		2,000	46.4%
Nova Scotia	40,000	19.2%	12,000	7.3%	23,000	77.2%
New Brunswick	29,000	17.0%	12,000	8.8%	15,000	60.6%
Quebec	393,000	24.0%	206,000	15.7%	148,000	61.8%
Ontario	463,000	17.1%	222,000	10.1%	204,000	57.6%
Manitoba	63,000	23.2%	35,000	15.9%	20,000	66.8%
Saskatchewan	48,000	18.7%	24,000	12.1%	23,000	46.8%
Alberta	123,000	16.3%	71,000	11.5%	38,000	44.7%
British Columbia	133,000	15.0%	65,000	9.0%	62,000	49.7%
Canada	1,327,000	18.8%	668,000	11.7%	546,000	57.1%

Source: National Council of Welfare, 2000:87.

Even though there has been slight improvements of child poverty rates between 1997 and 1998, the number of children living in poverty has remained unacceptably high. In fact, the number of poor children increased by 42% in Canada between pre-recession 1989 and 1998. Ontario has had by far the largest increase in poor children between 1989 and 1998, the number of poor children in Ontario doubled from 254,000 to 463,000 in 1998 (National Council of Welfare, 2000:87).

Table 12, based on Statistics's Canada Survey of Consumer Finances Microdata, examines how much of the increase in a province's share of poor families and individuals between 1989 and 1997 was related to changing provincial population distributions and how much was due to changes in poverty rates (Ross et al., 2000: 65). This would indicate what are the factors behind the shifts in the composition of poor families because a group's share of poor households can grow in two ways: either through growth in its poverty rate or increases in its population share relative to the rest of Canada. In the latter case, the poverty rate may stay the same, however its share of poor would increase because its overall population is growing faster than the rest of the country (Ross et al., 2000: 65).

Table 12 : The Causes Of Changes In Provincial Poverty, 1989-1997

	% Change in Share of Population		% Change in Share of Poor Population		% Increase in Number of Poor due to Population Growth		% Increase in Number of Poor due to Increase in Poverty Rate	
	Families	Individuals	Families	Individuals	Families	Individuals	Families	Individuals
Newfoundland	11.5	16.1	52.6	12.5	20.0	129.0	80.0	-29.0
PEI	11.8	30.8	—	40.0	—	76.9	—	23.1
Nova Scotia	13.4	27.8	33.3	26.5	40.0	104.9	60.0	-4.9
New Brunswick	14.3	25.4	29.2	25.0	57.1	101.6	42.9	-1.6
Quebec	12.5	25.7	41.8	25.9	29.4	99.2	70.6	0.8
Ontario	22.4	31.1	87.7	31.2	25.4	99.8	74.6	0.2
Manitoba	9.0	17.2	21.6	16.4	37.5	104.7	62.5	-4.7
Saskatchewan	4.6	25.9	6.1	24.3	50.0	106.3	50.0	-6.3
Alberta	20.8	34.5	19.3	34.5	106.3	99.8	-6.3	0.2
British Columbia	32.0	40.0	51.0	39.9	64.0	100.3	36.0	-0.3
Canada	17.9	28.8	50.1	28.9	35.8	99.7	64.2	0.3

Source: Statistics Canada, 1999 in Ross et al., 2000:65

The two first columns examine the percentage change in share of total population compared to poor population, and the last two columns examine the percentage increase in number of poor due either to population growth or an increase in poverty rate.

In the case of Ontario, three-quarters (74.6%) of its increased share of poor families was due to increases in poverty rate, while one-quarter was because of the fact the Ontario had proportionately more families in 1997 than it did in 1989. In a similar way, the growth in the number of poor families in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Quebec and Manitoba was principally a result of increases in their respective rates of poverty (Ross et al., 2000:65).

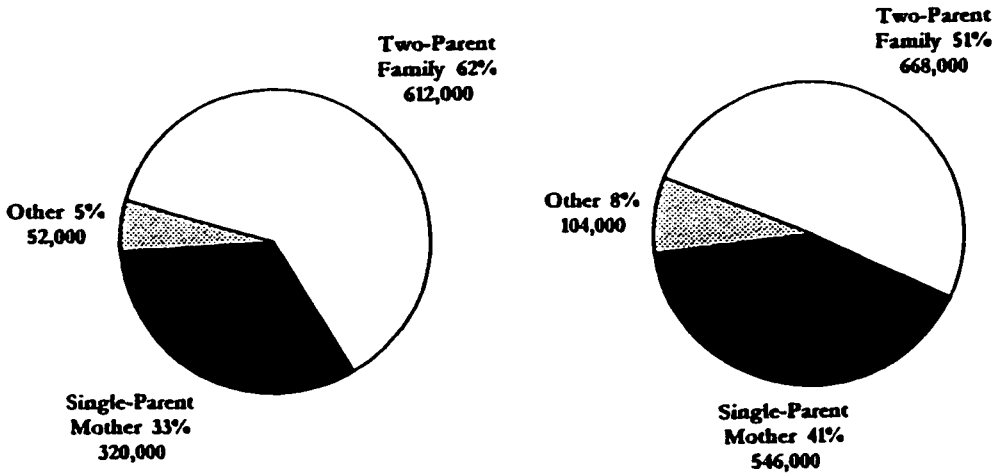
As the above results indicate, the percentage change in share of poor population is more important than the changes in the number of families or an increase in population.

One long-standing myth about child poverty is that most poor children live in single-parent households. However, table 11 shows that this is in fact not the case and that 668,000 poor children lived in two-parent families under 65, while 546,000 poor children lived in single mother families in 1998. Furthermore, in every province, there are more poor children living in two-parent families than in single-parent mother families (National Council of Welfare, 2000:87).

However, the proportion of poor children living in single mother families has grown drastically in recent years. As shown in chart 4, produced by the National Council of Welfare, in 1980, 33% of all poor children lived in families headed by single mothers of all ages and most of the rest lived in two-parent families. In 1998,

however, the percentage of poor children in single mother families of all ages was up to 41% and the percentage was down to 51% for children living with both parents (2000:88).

Chart 4 : Poor Children by Family Type, 1980 and 1998



1980 (984,000 children) **1998 (1,318,000 children)**

Source: National Council of Welfare, 2000:53.

Table 13, from Statistics Canada looks at the prevalence of low income for different categories in Canada: all persons, economic family persons such as elderly persons, persons under 18 living in two-parent or lone-parent female- headed families and unattached individuals. It shows that for children under 18 years of age, living in two parent families, the low income was 8.4% in 1998, where as the percentage was 45.6% for children living in female-lone parent families (2000:185).

Table 13 : Persons in Low Income, Prevalence of Low Income (%)

CANADA	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
	Prevalence of low income (%)									
All persons	**10.2**	**11.0**	**12.2**	**12.2**	**13.1**	**12.5**	**13.2**	**14.2**	**13.7**	**12.2**
Males	8.8	9.7	11.2	11.2	12.0	11.3	12.3	13.5	12.7	11.4
Females	11.5	12.4	13.3	13.2	14.3	13.7	14.1	15.0	14.7	13.0
Economic family persons	**7.7**	**8.5**	**9.4**	**9.5**	**10.4**	**9.8**	**10.6**	**11.4**	**10.8**	**9.3**
Males	6.8	7.5	8.6	8.6	9.3	8.8	9.8	10.7	9.9	8.6
Females	8.5	9.5	10.1	10.3	11.5	10.7	11.4	12.0	11.6	9.9
Elderly persons	3.1	2.3	2.4	2.4	3.3	2.1	1.7	2.5	3.2	3.0
Males	3.3	2.4	2.5	2.4	3.5	1.9	1.8	2.3	2.9	2.6
Females	2.9	2.0	2.4	2.4	3.1	2.2	1.6	2.7	3.6	3.5
Persons under 18 years of age	11.8	13.2	14.4	14.3	15.9	15.0	16.5	17.2	16.1	13.8
In two-parent families	7.0	7.8	8.8	8.3	9.9	9.3	10.8	11.5	10.7	8.4
In female-lone parent families	48.0	50.6	53.8	47.8	48.6	48.7	51.5	52.7	50.9	45.6
In all other economic families	16.9	21.2	18.6	22.2	19.8	25.9	21.7	24.9	21.0	19.3
Persons 18 to 64 years of age	6.4	7.2	8.1	8.3	8.9	8.6	9.3	3.0	3.7	3.1
Males	5.0	5.7	6.7	6.7	7.2	7.2	8.0	3.2	3.6	2.8
Females	7.7	8.6	9.4	9.8	10.5	9.9	10.5	2.8	3.8	3.4
Unattached individuals	**27.8**	**28.2**	**30.8**	**30.5**	**30.9**	**30.4**	**30.5**	**32.5**	**32.0**	**30.3**
Males	23.1	24.9	28.2	28.5	29.0	27.5	29.1	30.9	30.2	28.3
Females	32.0	31.3	33.2	32.6	32.8	33.4	31.9	34.1	33.8	32.2
Elderly persons	27.3	26.9	26.9	24.3	26.3	20.7	21.1	23.7	21.6	20.8
Males	16.7	19.3	21.0	15.6	19.0	12.1	11.9	17.6	16.6	17.4
Females	30.7	29.3	28.9	27.1	28.8	23.6	24.2	25.8	23.5	22.1
Persons < 65 years of age	27.9	28.7	32.2	32.7	32.7	34.0	34.0	36.0	36.1	33.9
Males	24.1	25.8	29.4	30.4	30.6	29.9	31.9	33.3	32.7	30.3
Females	32.9	32.6	35.9	36.2	35.6	40.1	37.0	39.8	40.9	38.8

Source: Statistics Canada, 2000:54.

The factors contributing to the higher number of lone-parent families have changed over the decades. In the past, one of the main reasons was death of spouse/parent. However, that reason has been gradually replaced by separation/divorce. Even though marital breakup remains one of the most important factors with regard to higher number of single parents, the nonmarriage of the mother has also become increasingly important (Mandell et al., 1995:93).

The level of poverty in many female-headed households is not because of non-involvement in the work force, but because the working mothers are more likely to be part of the "working poor". This can be attributed to the lack of resources that lone-mothers bring to jobs such as low levels of educational attainment and inexperience

associated with youth (Mandell et al., 1995:100).

Structural factors also play an important role in the above situation. For example, one such factor is the provincially set minimum wage rates, which are low. Furthermore, lower pay of women and gender segregation of jobs contribute to the high rates of poverty among single-mother families, along with low levels of child support from fathers and low public assistance (Mandell et al., 1995:100).

A prevailing assumption is that there is an element of choice for female single parents with regard to full-time parenting and paid employment. This perceived choice reinforces the negative stereotypes of divorced mothers in the labour force.

> Working women have been characterized after divorce independent, self-sufficient women and non-working as alimony drones, attempting to live off their ex-husbands or as welfare scroungers living off the tax payers. (Gorlick, 1995:218).

Changes in social welfare policy aimed at single mothers dependent on social assistance also reinforce such stereotype. In a comparison of social welfare systems in Britain, U.S. and Canada, Evans (1992) found that the Canadian system is more similar to the U.S. model, which puts more emphasis on employability as a primary alternative to long term social assistance (Gorlick, 1995:218).

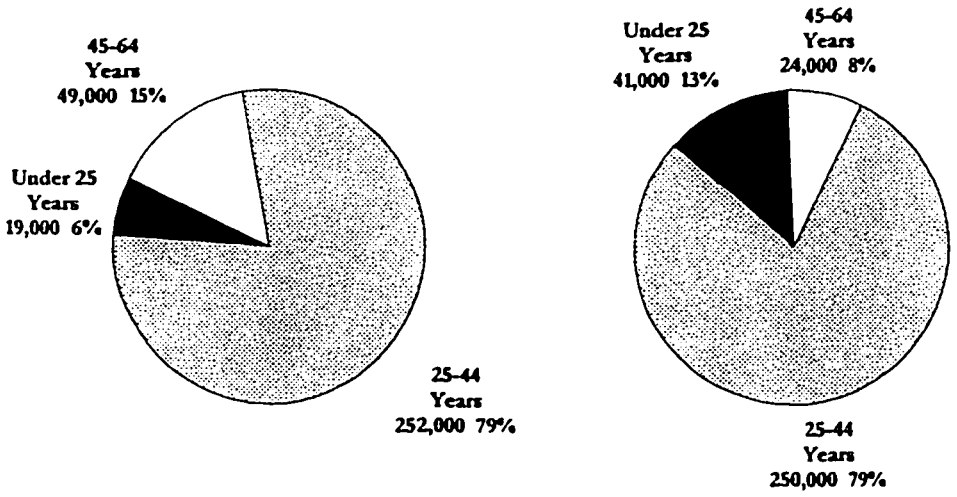
Age of the Head of the Family

Age is another significant factor in the changing distribution of poor families. According to the Canadian Council on Social Development, "if the experience of poverty was evenly distributed through the population, the share of various groups of poor families and individuals would be expected to be consistent with the population

share of these same groups over time. For example, as the number of families headed by young people fell, their population share of the poor would be expected to decline as well." However, this has not been the case and between 1989 and 1997, while the population share of young families remained constant, their share of families increased by 2.1 percentage points (2000:62).

The chart 5 shows the distribution of poor couples with children and poor single parent mothers by their age group. More than three-quarters or 79% of poor families with children are headed by parents in the age group 25 to 44. According to the National Council of Welfare, this is not surprising since most women have babies in their 20's and 30's. The proportion of poor single mothers less than 25 years was slightly more than twice as high as that for couples (2000:40).

Chart 5 :Distribution of Poor Families by Age of Family Head, 1998



Couples with Children
(320,000 Families)

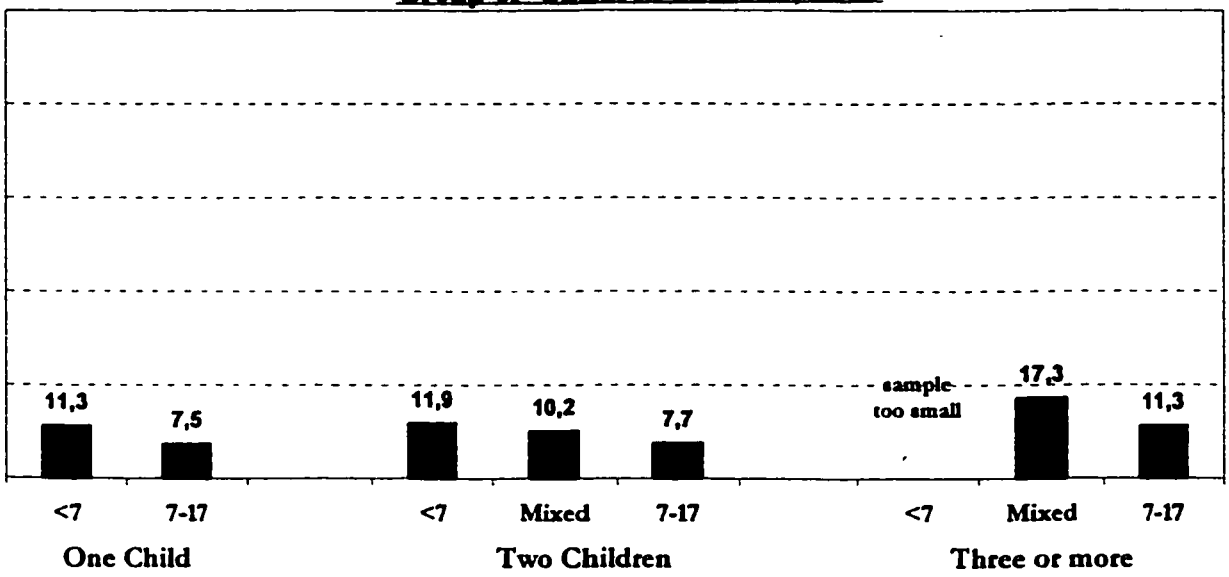
Single-Parent Mothers
(315,000 Families)

Source: National Council Of Welfare, 2000:41.

Number and Age of Children

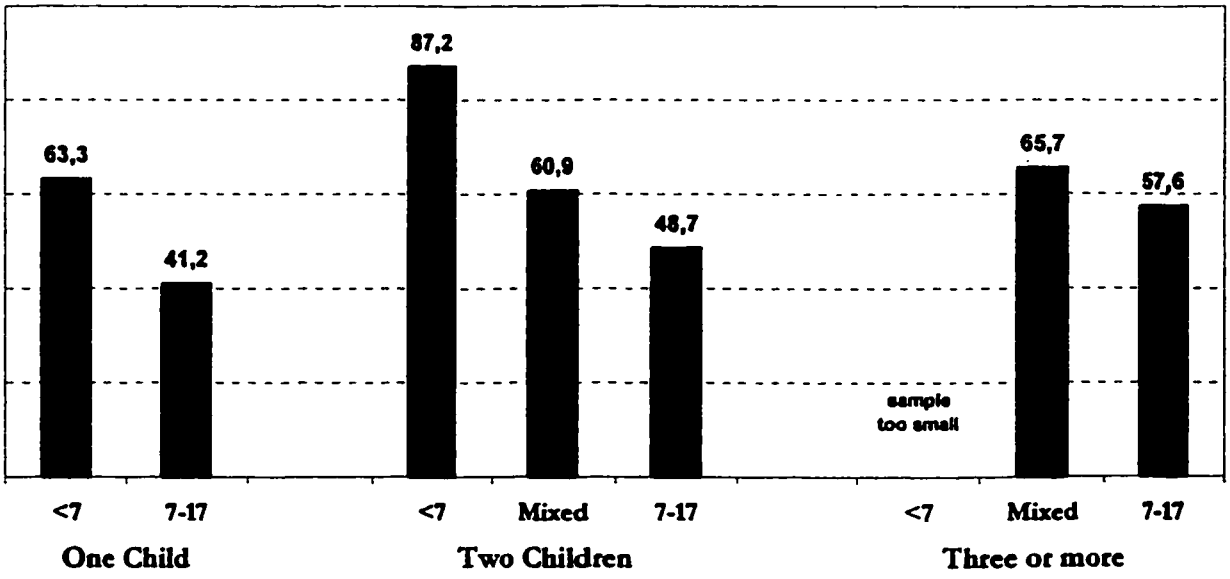
Another important factor which is not mentionned in most of the literature except by the National Council of Welfare is the number and age of children. The poverty rates vary noticeably with the number and age of children, as the next graphs shows.

Graph 2: Poverty Rates for Two-parent Families under 65, by Number and Age Group of Children under 18, 1998



Source: National Council Of Welfare, 2000:47.

Graph 3: Poverty Rates for Single-Parent Mothers under 65, By Number and Age Group of Children Under 18, 1998



Source: National Council Of Welfare, 2000:48.

Even though the patterns are not perfect, the two graphs suggest that poverty rates increase with the number of children but decrease once the youngest child reaches school age (2000:47).

The risk of poverty rate is higher for families of all types with very young children because the job of caring for toddlers and infants sometimes keeps mothers out ot the labour market. "The absence of high-quality, affordable child care is a major problem for parents with young children, especially single parents. Mothers are more inclined to take jobs outside the home once their youngest children are off to school (National Council of Welfare, 2000:47).

4:4 The Depth Of Poverty

Until now, the distribution of poverty has been presented. However, there are two other dimensions to poverty . The first is depth: how far below the poverty line a poor person's income falls. The second is duration: how long a spell of poverty lasts (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2000:102). These indicators are very important since all measures of poverty generate estimates of the rate or the incidence of poverty. However, the above indicators, which are the two other important statistical dimension-depth and duration- round out an understanding of poverty (Ross et al., 2000:34). These indicators provide a more complete picture with regard to poverty in terms of its extent, duration and depth.

According to the National Council of Welfare, it is one thing to measure the risk of poverty and another to measure its severity. Poverty rates " show the percentage of the population that is poor each year, but they do not show whether poor people are living in abject poverty or a few dollars below the poverty line. For

that, we need measures of the depth of poverty." (2000: 56). Depth of poverty statistics allow us to calculate the "poverty gap" to show how much additional income is needed to bring families and individuals out of poverty (National Council of Welfare, 2000: 56).

In other words, depth of poverty means how far a family's income is below the poverty line and how much money is required to bring a poor family's income up to the poverty line (Ross et al., 2000:34).

Table14, by the Canadian Council on Social Development, looks at the poverty gap: how each household is below the low income cut-off set by Statistics Canada, for the years 1989 and 1997, using the 1997 $.

Table 14 : Average Household Poverty Gap, 1989 and 1997 (1997$)

Characteristic	Amount of gap ($) 1989	1997	$ change
Canada	$6,144	$7,160	$1,016
Newfoundland	$5,596	$5,973	$377
Prince Edward Island	$4,720	$4,743	$23
Nova Scotia	$4,765	$6,171	$1,406
New Brunswick	$5,323	$5,990	$668
Quebec	$6,144	$6,853	$709
Ontario	$5,776	$7,634	$1,858
Manitoba	$6,106	$6,872	$766
Saskatchewan	$6,334	$5,796	-$539
Alberta	$7,513	$7,456	-$57
British Columbia	$6,033	$7,196	$1,162
Family type			
Non-elderly			
couple, no children < 18	$6,609	$7,999	$1,391
couple, with children < 18	$8,844	$10,115	$1,272
female lone parent, with children < 18	$8,868	$9,046	$178
male lone parent, with children < 18	$6,848	$7,710	$862
unattached individual < 65	$6,452	$7,462	$1,010
Elderly			
couple	$3,472	$4,295	$824
unattached individual 65 +	$2,887	$2,993	$106
Other	$7,494	$7,198	-$296
Age			
Non-elderly	$7,351	$8,265	$914
Elderly	$3,065	$3,169	$104

Source: Statistics Canada, 1999 in Ross et al., 2000:105.

Looking at the data, we see that the depth of poverty increased between 1989

and 1997, the largest increases in average poverty gap experienced was in Ontario (41,858), followed by Nova Scotia ($1,406). However, Saskatchewan and Alberta, experienced a decline in the size of their average poverty gaps over this time (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2000:105).

Table 15, by the National Council of Welfare, presents the depth of poverty by family type.

Table 15 : Average Depth of Poverty by Family Type in Constant 1998 Dollars

Family Type	Dollars Below Poverty Line in 1980	Dollars Below Poverty Line in 1997	Dollars Below Poverty Line in 1998
Single-Parent Mothers under 65 with Children under 18	$10,549	$9,458	$9,230
Couples under 65 with Children under 18	$8,692	$8,925	$8,772
Unattached Women under 65	$7,664	$7,100	$7,038
Unattached Men under 65	$7,347	$7,055	$6,803
Childless Couples under 65	$7,030	$7,097	$7,170
Unattached Men 65 and Older	$4,312	$3,012	$3,280
Unattached Women 65 and Older	$4,150	$2,528	$2,475
Couples 65 and Older	$3,532	$3,183	$3,488

Source: National Council of Welfare, 2000:57.

The above table shows that single mothers under 65 with children had the largest depth of poverty in all 3 years in terms of dollars below the poverty line. Even though the situation improved in 1998, they remained $9,230 on average below the poverty line. Furthermore, poor couples under 65 with children under 18 saw their situation deteriorate between 1980 and 1998 (2000:57).

4.5: Duration of Poverty

Some people believe that same individuals have low incomes year after year and that the population with low income is static and exhibits little turn over. However, even though living with low income is a long term reality for some, considerable movement into and out of low income takes place over time (Morissette and Zhang, 2001:25).

With regard to children, Morissette and Zhang found that 12% of all children under 6 lived in families that had low income for four years, compared to 8% of all persons. On the other hand, 29% of these children experienced low income for at least one year (2001:26). The lone-parent families had the highest percentage (38%) of those who live in low-income for four years or more.

Table 16 : People with Low Income , 1993 to 1998

Characteristics	Years of low income								
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	1+	4+
	%								
Both sexes	76.0	8.0	4.7	3.0	2.9	2.2	3.3	24.0	8.4
Men	78.0	7.5	4 5	2.3	2.8	2.0	3.0	22.0	7.8
Women	74.0	8.4	4 9	3.7	2.9	2.5	3.6	26.0	9.0
Age in 1993									
Less than 6	71.0	7.9	5.8	3.3	3.7	3.4	5.0	29.0	12.1
6 to 17	72.4	9.7	5.3	3.5	3.3	2.8	3.0	27.6	9.1
18 to 24	61.5	13.4	8.8	5.5	5.4	2.4	3.0	38.5	10.8
Not a student	75.9	9.8	--	--	--	--	--	24.1	7.0
Student	56.5	18.4	10.8	5.6	4.0	2.9	1.8	43.5	8.7
25 to 34	76.5	7.4	5.5	2.7	2.4	2.7	2.8	23.5	7.9
35 to 44	80.9	6.8	3.0	2.2	2.7	1.5	3.0	19.1	7.2
45 to 54	81.4	5.0	3.7	2.7	2.2	1.7	3.5	18.6	7.4
55 to 64	77.3	7.7	4.7	2.5	2.0	2.3	3.6	22.7	7.9
65 and over	84.1	6.2	1.6	1.9	1.8	--	3.6	15.9	6.2
Men	94.5	--	--	--	--	--	--	5.5	--
Women	83.8	7.2	2.5	1.4	--	--	3.1	16.2	5.0
Family composition (all years)									
Unattached	61.0	7.2	4.1	4.4	3.4	4.0	15.9	39.0	23.3
Couple, no children	91.3	4.6	1.7	1.2	--	--	--	8.7	1.1
Couple with children	84.4	5.3	3.1	1.7	1.4	1.7	2.5	15.6	5.6
Lone parent	42.4	5.8	3.5	10.3	8.4	10.2	19.4	57.6	38.0
Other	84.7	4.6	3.2	--	4.3	--	--	15.3	6.8
Changed over period	67.7	12.2	7.6	4.2	4.1	2.4	1.9	32.3	8.4

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001:27.

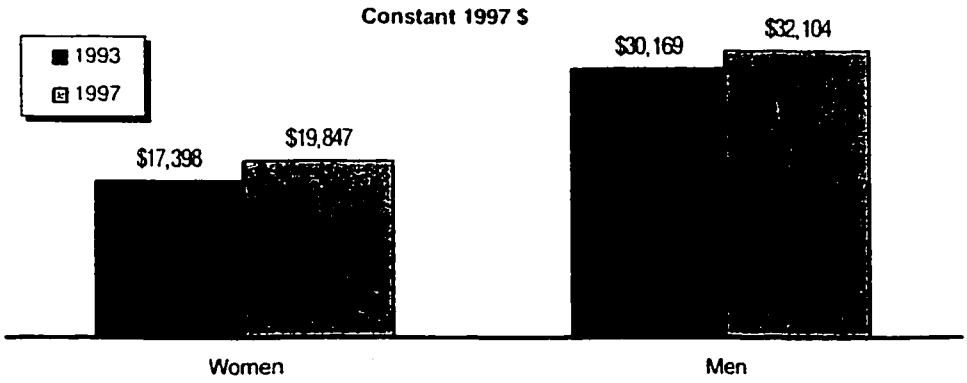
4.6: Gender Gap

As discussed in the theory section, some believe that differences between men's and women's earnings and the inequalities in terms of incomes create disadvantages for women and lead to poverty for women and children, especially for single mothers.

According to Statistics Canada, women generally have lower incomes than men. The latest data show that in 1997, the average annual pre-tax income of women aged 15 and over from all sources was $19,800, which is just 62% the figure for men, who had an average income of $ 32,100 that year (Lindsay, 2000:135).

Chart 6, from Statistics Canada Report, "Women In Canada 2000", shows the average income of men and women in 1993 and 1997.

Chart 6: Average Income of Women and Men, 1993 to 1997



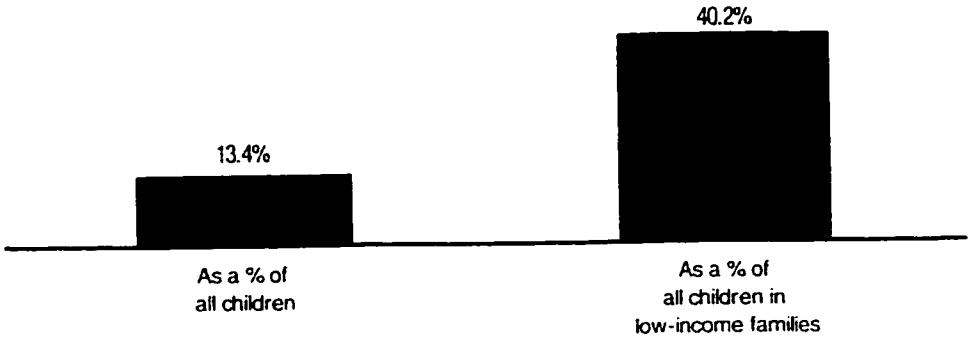
Source: Statistics Canada, 2000:135.

The income situation of women varies greatly depending on their family status. By far, lone-parent families headed by women have the lowest incomes of all family types. For example, in 1997, single mother families under age 65 had an average income of $25,400, only 39% as much as non-elderly two-spouse families with children ($64,800),

and juste 65% that of lone-parent families headed by men ($39,400) (Lindsay, 2000:137).

In terms of proportion, in 1997, 56% of all families headed by single mothers had incomes which fell below the low income Cut-offs. In comparison, 24% of male lone-parent families and just 12% of non-elderly two-parent families with children had low incomes that year (Lindsay, 2000:136).

Chart 7: Children in lone-parent families headed by women as a percentage of all low income children, 1997



Source: Statistics Canada, 2000:139.

Feminists argue that women's subordination is a result of the combination of two systems of dominations: Patriarchy and Capitalism. Broadly speaking, patriarchy refers to male domination over women and more specifically, it describes forms of family organization where fathers and husbands hold most of the power. Capitalism incorporated earlier patriarchal social arrangements. However, remnants of patriarchy continue to reinforce stereotypes of women as cheap, expendable labour. Moreover, women's traditional family roles of mother and wife often restrict their employment opportunities and create a double day for those who are employed (Krahn and Graham, 1993: 157).

At the heart of gender inequality in the work force is the structuring of the labour market into female and male segments. Occupational gender segregation refers to

> The concentration of men and women in different occupations. A potent combination of gender-role socialization, education, and market mechanisms channel women into a limited number of occupations in which mainly other females are employed. (Krahn and Graham, 1993:160-1).

For example, the majority of women continue to work in sectors where women have traditionally been concentrated. For instance, in 1999, 70% of all employed women were in teaching, nursing and related health occupations, clerical or other administrative positions, sales and service occupations, compared to just 29% of men who were employed in these sectors (Statistics Canada, 2000:107) However, it should also be noted that men are also concentrated in occupations and most of both concentrations is by choice.

Therefore, even though there have been important advances with regard to the number of women in the labour force and their income, there is still room for improvement, especially with regard to the situation of the single mothers which has not approved much over the years and needs special attention in terms of policies.

4:7 Different Views With regard to the Incidence and Severity of Poverty

In contrast to those who think that poverty rates are too high in Canada, some think that these rates are exaggerated and argue that poverty is not very high in Canada.

For example, in the book "Poverty In Canada, Sarlo says that

> I believe that Canadians have serious doubt about claims of widespread poverty in this country. Skepticism is wholly justified. These estimates of the extent of poverty in Canada are grossly exaggerated. The fact is

> that poverty, as it has been traditionally understood, has been virtually eliminated. It is simply not a major problem in Canada (1996:2).

The reason, according to him, is because of a basic misinterpretation. since the existing poverty lines are "relative lines" and are not linked to the actual costs of basic necessities and are "substantially above such costs". However, the low-income cut-offs are used almost exclusively as "poverty lines" and to sell them as poverty lines, or "even to acquiesce in their use as such, is simply inappropriate." (1996:2).

Sarlo argues that the continuing use of the LICO's, despite Statistics Canada's stance that they have no officially recognized status as such, may underline a political agenda and healthy self-interest (1996). Sarlo is an advocate of looking at poverty in absolute terms.

> Poverty is a strong word. It doesn't mean "relatively less well off". The traditional meaning of the word conveys a sense of real deprivation, of lacking basic needs, of compromising long term physical health. I have argued that this is the sense in which most people understand poverty and that this sense must be preserved." (1996:197).

Christopher Sarlo proposes a different way of defining and measuring poverty, called "The necessities approach", which is "based on the cost of providing essential goods and services, the so called "absolute approach" (1996:47).

Using the measure for poverty which he created, Sarlo's latest update for the poverty rates in 1996 show that the number of poor persons in Canada were 1,083,777 in 1993 (the incidence of poverty was 3.24%).

The above figures demonstrate that the Sarlo's measure grossly underestimate the number and incidence of poverty in Canada. However, his measure is not widely used

and it tends to focus more on mere survival than physical, social and psychological well-being and the long-term well-being of individuals.

Sarlo's view are more in line with the functionalist paradigm. He maintains that while poverty has not been entirely eradicated, poverty is not a major problem in Canada and every one is able to acquire the basic necessities of life (1996:193).

Sarlo's measure has been criticized because all social amenities are completely excluded and for selecting and pricing the goods in the basket, the quality and type of each item is "at least at the minimum acceptable standard within the community in which one resides." (Ross et al, 2000:26).

Having presented the factors associated with child poverty as well as different perspectives on the issue, the next section examines some of the factors related to child poverty using the General Social Survey.

4.8: General Social Survey-Regression Analysis

Besides looking at some of the main factors that influence child poverty presented in the literature, I decided to do my own data analysis. In spite of the considerable study of poverty, very little work has been done where the various factors are examined together. All the results that have been reported thus far in this study involve univariate or bivariate analysis. This does not allow the introduction of many controls and it is the introduction of these controls that will allow to test the validity of the various explanations offered. For example, if the feminist argument is true, then we would expect that gender remains an important variable even when we control for things like education or number of children.

Similarly, if the functionalist argument is true then we would expect to find that human capital variables such as education or age are more important in explaining poverty levels than structural factors such as specific regions of the country. This follows from the functionalist argument that poverty is the result of lack of motivation and labour demands.

If the conflict argument is true, then we would expect to find the highest levels of poverty where the power of labour is the weakest. This can be tested by looking at different provinces since labour force power varies by province. For example, Atlantic Provinces are more likely to have higher unemployment rates because of seasonal work than other provinces. Statistics Canada reports that while employment rates in these provinces have increased since 1996, they are still low relative to the rest of the country (2001:19).

In order to test the above arguments, the relevant variables which were also mentioned in the literature were selected. However, all the factors mentioned in the literature were not chosen as variables, since using already produced data has limitations in terms of having fewer options with regard to the choice of variables available. Some of the variables selected were discussed in the literature such as family type, regional differences, age and number of children. Other variables such as sources of income were not discussed in the literature reviewed but were available for analysis in the data set, and it was interesting to include them as human capital variables that functionalists argue are important.

The relevant variables were chosen from The General Social Survey, Cycle 10, 1995, "Family and Friends". Data for cycle 10 were collected by Statistics Canada, using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) (1997:6). The target population for the GSS was all persons 15 years of age and over in Canada , excluding

1-Residents of the Yukon and New territories, and

2-Full-time residents in institutions.

All respondents were contacted by phone, employing Random Digit Dialing (RDD), a telephone sampling method (1995:8). The sample size was 11,985 Canadians, 15 years of age or older, with a response rate of 80.7% (1995:8). The variables used were:

-Size of respondent's household-HHSIZCAP

This variable was selected in order to be used with the variable "Total household income" in order to create a measure of poverty, since there was no variable that

measured poverty directly and therefore a new variable had to be created.

-Total household income-DVR45

This variable was selected, as indicated above, because it was combined with the variable "size of respondent's household" to create a new variable to measure poverty.

-Respondent's children living in household full-time-CHDINFTC

This variable was included, since it is an important factor with regard to the likelihood of poverty, and it is the main focus of this study.

-Family type of respondent's-FamType

This variable was chosen because it showed different types of families such as two-parent or lone-parent families. Since this was a nominal variable, dummy variables were created for each of the following categories: Couple, Intact families (2 parents and children), Step families with children and lone-parent families.

-Province of residence of respondent- PRO

Since the literature indicated that there are important differences with regard to level of poverty in different parts of Canada, this variable was selected to see if the analysis would indicate the same results. It is also used as an indicator of relative labour power. Since this was a nominal variable, a dummy variable was created and the new variables were: Atlantic region (Atl), Quebec (Que), Ontario (Ont) and Praries (Pra).

-Total number of respondent's children in household-ROSCHDC

The number of children in the household has been mentioned in the literature as an important indicator of poverty and as a result this variable was included in the analysis.

-Received income from wages/salary, self-employment-R50A

-Received income from government-R50B

The household income was discussed in the literature as an important factor with regard to poverty, however, the source of that income was not examined in the literature, therefore it was interesting to see if the source of income would be important as a structural factor with regard to the level of poverty.

Highest Level of Education Attained- DVL30Co

This variable was chosen in order to be used as a human capital factor to test the functionalist argument. The categories for the dummy variable were: university or diploma, some university or diploma, high school diploma, less than high school.

Age of the respondent- DV10AG15

The variable age was chosen as an indicator of human capital factor to test the functionalist argument.

-Sex of the respondent- DVSEX

The sex of the respondent was used to test the feminist argument with regard to the importance of gender over structural or human capital factors.

In order to use a variable to measure child poverty, first, the variable POV or poverty in the household was created by combining the two variables household size (hhsizcap) and total household income (dvr54) in order to create a measure to approximate low-income cut-offs according to Statistics Canada for 1995.

Table 17: Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut-offs (1986 Base) for 1995 Metropolitan Areas

Family Size	Low Income Cut-Offs
1	$15,819
2	$21,442
3	$27,256
4	$31,383
5	$34,287
6	$37,219
7	$40,029

Source: National Council of Welfare, 1997

Table 18 presents the combination of the two variables household size and household income. In other words, the variables household size and household income were used from the GSS10 and a new variable was created to measure poverty. This method had its limitations since the variable income was reported in categories in the GSS10 and not with the same cutoffs as LICO. Therefore, an attempt was made to create a new variable that was close to the levels of LICO by using the Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut-offs for 1995 (Table 17), then matching the categories of the variable Household size to the Household income to produce a new variable to measure poverty. As it can be seen by comparing the table 17 to table 18, for the first two categories (family size 1 and 2), the income was underestimated (the LICO for one person was set at $15,819 and at $21,442 for two persons, however, for the new variable, the limit had to be set at $14,999 and $19,999 respectively). For a family

size of 3, the LICO was set at $27,256, and in the new variable, it fell within the range and was estimated to be between $20,000 and $29,999. However, for the family size of 4, the low income level was slightly underestimated ($31,383 in LICO) compared to $29,999. The other categories in the new variable (household size 5,6,7) fell within the same range as estimated by the LICO.

Table 18: Household Size and Income

Household Size	The Income Categories fromDVR54 Based on 1995 LICO
1	< $14,999
2	< $ 15,000 to $19,999
3,4	< $20,000 to $ 29,999
5,6,7+	<$30,000 to $39,999

Table 19 presents the new variable POV, which measures poverty in the house hold.

Table 19 : Univariate Breakdown

POV	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percent
Non-Poor	11995582	51.6	76.7
Poor	3635610	15.6	23.3
Missing	7635933	32.8	Missing

The missing cases were the categories "refusals" and the "Don't Know" in the variable household income in the GSS10.

The data in Census Canada for 1996 show that 1,267,205 families had low income and the incidence of low-income was 16.3%. The figures in the census are relatively close to the numbers obtained above if the missing cases are included. However, if the missing cases are taken out, the percentage of the poor measured by

the variable POV increases (23.8% compared to 16.3% in the census).

Statistics Canada reported that in 1995, 14.5% of persons lived in low income families which again is close to the percentage of the poor in the variable POV, if the missing cases are included (1999:15).

Since there was a large number of missing cases, this influenced the results and in order to see the profiles of those who were classified as missing, they were examined in terms of different characteristics such as education, province of residence, age, family type and gender.

The results from the crosstabulations showed that those who had not reported their income had less education (high school or less), were more likely to reside in Ontario and the western provinces, were more likely to be between the ages of 15 to 24, live in nuclear families and be female. The implications of the large number of missing cases for the results is that it is more likely to underestimate the incidence of poverty.

In order to look at child poverty, PCHH, a new measure was created as a result of combining children in the household full-time (chdinftc) and poor households (pov). PCHH measures poor households with children and would be the dependent variable.

Table 20 : Univariate Distribution

PCHH	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percent
No poor children	15105699	64.9	85.3
Poor children	2604258	11.2	14.7
Missing	5557169	23.9	Missing

In comparison, Statistics Canada reported that in 1995, 21% of children lived in low-income families (1999:15).

In order to look at the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable, they were put in a linear regression model since the dependent variable was a dichotomy. All variables were entered stepwise in order to see the importance of each with regard to poverty, while the other variables are controlled.

As discussed before, one important objective for using the regression was to see which theories would be best supported by using variables that would measure the main argument or the main position of each variable. The regression would then be used to test each of the propositions.

-If the functionalist perspective is true, then we would expect that a human capital factor such as education would be very important, even when we control for other variables such as gender or structural factors such as different regions.

-If the conflict perspective is true, then we would expect that structural factors such as regional differences would be very important, even when other variables such as human capital factors or gender are controlled.

-If the feminist perspective is true, then we would expect that gender remains an important variable even when we control for other structural factors (regions) or for human capital factors (education).

Running the variables in a regression model, the variables which were significant were:

Table 21: Beta-full Model and Beta-reduced Model

Variable	Beta-Full Model	Beta-Reduced Model
Couple	.007	
Intact family	-.006	
Step fam.w. child	.012	
lone parent	.200*	.199*
No. of chil. in hh	.236*	.234*
Received wage/sal	.190*	.194*
Received incom.gov	-.121*	-.121*
Atlantic region	.031*	.034*
Quebec	.008	
Ontario	-.021	
Praries	-.001	
Age	-.243*	-.242*
Gender	.010	
Univ/Diploma	-.188*	-.192*
Some Univ/Dip	-.099*	-.100*
High School	-.121*	-.124*

Beta-reduced Model
Multiple R=.46
R Square=.21
*=<.001

The above figures show that age was the most important factor, followed by the number of children in the household, living in a lone-parent family, receiving salary/wages, having a university degree or some kind of post secondary diploma, having a high school diploma, receiving income from government (such as child tax benefit and not welfare), having some university education or diploma, and residing in Atlantic regions.

The above results show that human capital factors that functionalists perspective considers important such as education were important, with more education (university,

community college, technical diploma), there is less likelihood of poverty. Having some university education and a high school diploma were also significant. Furthermore, age was very significant, with the younger households experiencing less poverty.

Moreover, the higher the number of children in the household, there is more likelihood of poverty. Lone parent families were as expected, more likely to be among poor households. Having wages and salaries was also positively related to povery.

With regard to income, the reason that income from government was significant but in a negative way is because the variable looks at income sources such as Child Tax Benefit and Canada and Quebec Pension Plan and not welfare. Therefore, this income may supplement the income of household and not be the main source of income. It may add to the income of the household and therefore negatively affect child poverty.

With regard to the conflict perspective's stance that structural factors are more important, the results show that indeed the Atlantic region which has one of the highest unemployment rates and a more seasonal work was more likely to have poor households. It would have been interesting to be able to look at different variables such as part-time and full-time work. However, the variable in GSS10 only looked at whether the respondents were employed in the last 12 months. However, when the variable L12 (employment in the last 12 months) was added to the model, the variable which itself was not significant, made the variable Atlantic region insignificant. This may be due to a high intercorrelation between the variables sources of income and employment in the model

However, the feminist perspective with regard to the importance of gender was not supported since gender was not a significant factor when other factors were controlled. However, this could mean that gender inequity occurs through other processes such as number of children or full or part time work.

The results indicate that the human capital factors that the functionalist perspective considers to be important were indeed very significant, followed by structural factors such as poverty rates in different regions. Gender was not significant, however, the importance of education indicates that education is more important in terms of reducing poverty than gender or other structural factors such as labour power.

4.9: Implications for the Theories

Having presented the factors related to poverty, it is interesting to see how each theory's main points or arguments are supported by the data presented and which of the perspectives are more significant when other factors are controlled.

For example, the functionalists argue that some poverty or inequality is inevitable and that the poor will always be with us. Indeed, the data showing the total distribution of income illustrate that inequalities with regard to income have remained constant over the years and that the gap between the rich and the poor has widened.

Another central point of the functionalist theory with regard to inequality and poverty is that the unequal distribution of rewards and wealth is essential for maintaining society as we know it. As a result, a system of unequal rewards is important since it motivates people to compete for better resources, regardless of other structural factors such as residing in specific regions.

The data support the above claims and show that indeed, the length of poverty is not the same for every body. The duration of poverty by Statistics Canada shows that considerable movement into and out of low income takes place over time. However, this is not the case for every body that lives in poverty and structural factors such as specific regions or family type also influence the movement in and out of poverty. For example, the Atlantic provinces have one of highest poverty rates and unemployment rates in Canada because of seasonal work and thus are more likely to stay in poverty because of these structural factors. Furthermore, the type of family one lives in also has an impact on the duration of poverty and living with low income is a long term reality for some,

especially children and single mothers (Statistics Canada, 2001:26)

Another point in the functionalist argument is that human capital factors such as education are very important with regard to reducing the likelihood of poverty. Indeed, the results of analysis from the General Social Survey 10 show that education was a very significant factor, and with higher levels of education, there was less likelihood of poverty.

The conflict theory argues that the weakest among us, such as children or women are poor. The data with regard to the distribution of income and poverty rates show that indeed there are high poverty rates and low income among the weakest groups in society such as children and single mothers.

The conflict theorists also maintain that the highest levels of poverty are where the power of labour is the weakest. The data on provincial poverty shows that indeed the Atlantic regions, with their unemployment rates and seasonal jobs, have the highest poverty rates. The analysis from GSS10 also indicates that among all the regions, the households in Atlantic regions were more likely to experience poverty.

The feminist paradigm maintains that the poverty level reflects the inequalities in society with regard to women, especially single mothers. The data on poverty indicate that single mother's poverty rates are very high and have not decreased over the years. The single mother's poverty rate as well as their depth of poverty is very high and the situation is more grave for single mothers who have very young children. However, gender was not a significant factor in the analysis from GSS10 when all other factors were controlled.

Those from the feminist paradigm argue that the higher poverty rates for women

reflect the gender gap with regard to income and women having lower wages than men. The data on the differences in income between men and women show that indeed there is gender gap between men and women with regard to income. However, the differences in income are not constant and are influenced by factors such as marital status, age and education.

As the results from the GSS10 analysis show, the gender differences disappear when other factors are controlled.

Looking at the factors related to poverty while controlling for other factors provides a better understanding of which factors are the most important and it also indicates which theories are better supported by the data. The analysis from the GSS10 showed that human capital factors such as education and age which are considered to be very important by the functionalists were indeed more significant than other factors. Structural factors in terms of differences in labour force power in different regions were also important with the households in Atlantic regions more likely to be poor. However, gender was not significant in the analysis, when other factors are controlled. However, this does not indicate necessarily that gender differences are not important with regard to income, but it shows that other factors such as education could eliminate gender differences and reduce poverty regardless of gender.

5: Conclusion

As presented throughout this work, child poverty is an important social problem and even though the child poverty rates have slightly decreased, there is more to be done to reduce the rates.

Factors such as family type, residing in different provinces, age of the head of the family, number and age of children as well as depth and duration of poverty were found to be very important with regard to child poverty in the literature. The results of the regression analysis from the General Social Survey indicated that age was the most important factor, followed by the number of children in the household, living in a lone-parent family, receiving income from employment or supplemental income from government, education and residing in Atlantic Canada.

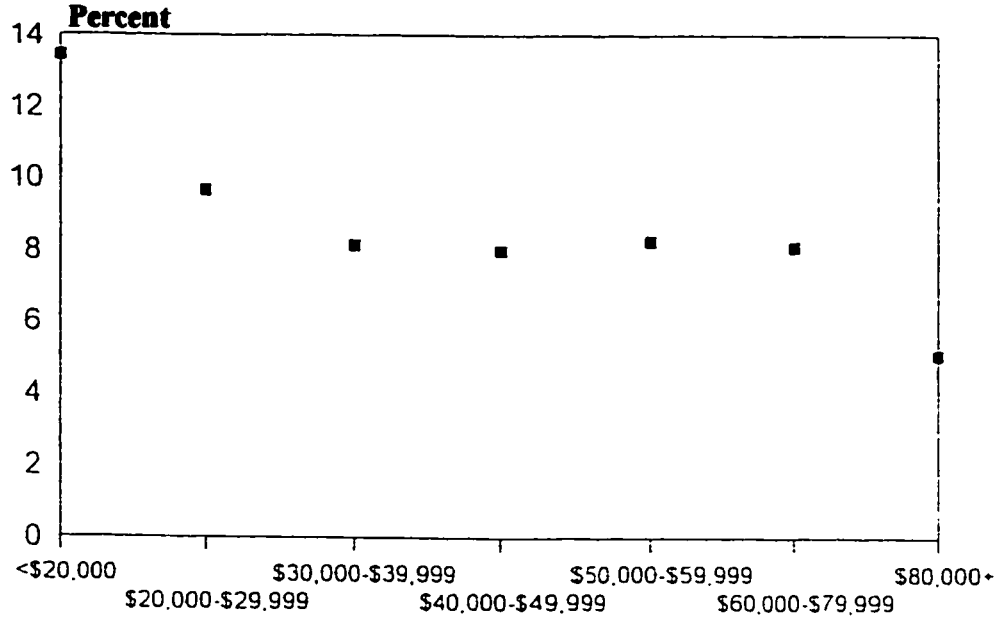
Poverty is a serious problem, not only in economic terms but also in social and physical terms with regard to physical health. Another important concern is the great polarization between the rich and the poor.

This gap and polarization between the incomes raise several questions such as the relationship of income distribution and healthy population, since life expectancy is higher when income inequality is lower. With regard to children, income and good child development are key factors in determining health, according to researchers. A healthy start in life has a long-term impact on the children's well-being. Poor children are less likely to be in good health, they are more than twice as likely to have low levels of hearing, speech, vision and dexterity and mobility, cognition and emotion (National Report on Child Poverty, 2000:3-5).

A report by the Canadian Council on Social Development examines the

relationship between income and child well-being. The chart below from that report looks at the relationship between income and basic health problems. Daily functionning is also known as "functional health" and is based on the results of testing on children for eight basic attributes :vision, hearing, speech, mobility, dexterity, cognition, emotion, and pain and discomfort. The chart was produced using the Statistics Canada's National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1994-1995 (1999:24).

Chart 8 : Children with basic health problems related to daily functionning



Source: Canadian Council On Social Development, 1999:24.

As seen by the above chart, the health and well-being of children are affected by low income, especially at the lowest income level. The consequences of growing up in poverty are well-documented and poor children are less likely to be in good health, achieve their academic potential, or have the opportunities to develop other skills and talents in sports or the arts (Ross et al., 2000:73).

With regard to public policy and how best it can support the optimal development of children, the Canadian Council on Social Development points out that "while government transfers can help redistribute income to Canada's poorest children, and thereby improve child outcomes and living conditions, transfers alone are not sufficient." (1999:40).

While acknowledging that improving a child's life chances will depend on each child and each family's situation, low income is a common factor that influences the outcomes. According to the Canadian Council on Social Development, poor access to nutritious food, adequate shelter and decent clothing can be redressed through income transfers. However, many factors in the home and neighborhood environments that result in poor developmental outcomes, such as family dysfunction, low parental education, dangerous neighborhoods, are a result of pre-existing conditions which will require support and assistance beyond income transfers (1999:40).

Family transfers are not the only solution with regard to improving the financial situation of poor families and are not the only anti-poverty strategy. According to the Canadian Council on Social Development ,

> Ideally, in addressing cases of low income, increased transfers should be accompanied by attempts to increase the economic self-reliance of families. This can be accompanied by providing educational and training opportunities, housing assistance, child care, workplace assistance to people with disabilities, job flexibility, and more flexible and family-friendly workplaces. The persistence of high levels of unemployment in some regions may require community supported job creation initiatives. By positively and pro-actively supporting families to generate more earnings, these measures will reduce the need for pure income transfers. (1999:40).

In this work, looking at child poverty, an attempt was made to examine this issue while addressing the difficulties with regard to defining and measuring

poverty and how poverty and inequality are seen differently in theoretical terms and from different perspectives. Poverty and child poverty are important social problems in Canada, however, the extent and severity of the problem is not seen the same way by every one and while some consider that poverty is not a big problem or a big concern in Canada, compared to other countries, others maintain that the opposite is true and that the poverty rates are too high for a country like Canada.

What is interesting about this issue which I have tried to show is that the debate about how to define and measure poverty as well as the reasons for poverty and the solutions never stops and is an ongoing process. However, what is important is not to think of poverty in abstract terms and try to define and measure poverty without realizing that for those individuals, families and children that live in poverty and have to struggle to make ends meet, this issue is not an academic one but something that they have to live with and struggle with.

The polarization of income in Canada and the widening gap between the rich and the poor also should be given attention, because if this trend continues, children living in poor families will be more likely to be affected themselves when they grow up. Furthermore, the economic situation and the increasing number of the single mothers should be carefully considered and receive attention.

According to Ross et al., in the "Canadian Fact Book On Poverty" ,

> The confluence of socio-demographic and economic change-represented by the increase in lone-parent families and the polarization of incomes and employment opportunities-threatens the economic security of a growing number of children." (2000:73).

The concentration on the widening gap between rich and poor and the class differences are the issues which are addressed by the conflict theory whereas the gender gap with regard to income and the situation of single mothers are the areas of special interest in the feminist theory. This indicates a more micro approach with regard to the causes and factors related to poverty as opposed to the functionalist theory which takes a rather macro view with regard to inequality and poverty. This implies more attention should be given to the weakest and most vulnerable groups in societies and priorities should be given to children.

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